NATION

Strike, rally in Ladakh over demand of statehood

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Sensex, Nifty rebound as Reliance, ITC shares rally

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SPORTS

If Rahul performs well in IPL, reward will be T20 WC: Langer

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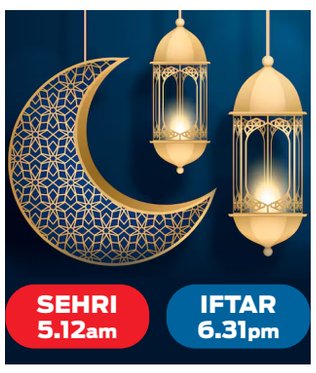

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India ranks 126 of 143 on global happiness index

NEW YORK, 20 MARCH

India was ranked 126th out of 143 nations in a global happiness index released on Wednesday which noted that older age is associated with higher life satisfaction in the world's most populous country.

Finland emerged as the happiest country in the world, topping the World Happiness Report 2024, the seventh successive year that the country has occupied the top spot on the list.

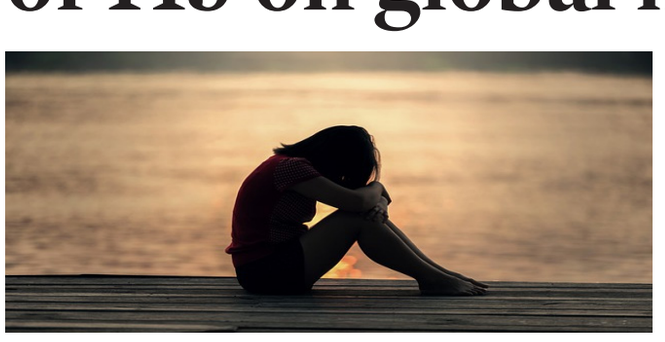
The other of the top 10 countries are Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Australia.

India is ranked 126th on the list, behind countries such as Libya, Iraq, Palestine and Niger, according to the findings announced on Wednesday to mark the UN's International Day of Happiness.

The World Happiness Report is a partnership of Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and the WHR's Editorial Board.

The youth in India are the "happiest" while those in "lower middle" rung are the least happy.

The US (23rd) has fallen out of the top 20 for the first time since the World Happiness Report was first published in 2012, driven by a large drop in the well-being of Americans under 30.



Older men are more satisfied with life than women **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Afghanistan remains bottom of the overall rankings as the world's unhappiest' nation. Pakistan is ranked 108th on the list.

The report said that older age is associated with higher life satisfaction in India, "refuting some claims that the positive association between age and life satisfaction only exists in high-income nations."

On average, older men in India are more satisfied with life than older women "but when taking all other measures into account, older women report higher life satisfaction than their male counterparts," it said. In India, older adults with secondary or higher education and those of higher social castes report higher life satisfaction than counterparts without formal education and those from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Satisfaction with living arrangements, perceived discrimination, and self-rated health emerge as the top three predictors of life satisfaction for India in this study, the report said. The findings of this study indicate that strengthening family networks to ensure a comfortable living arrangement for older adults, men, widowed, and those without formal education in particular, and bolstering social networks to reduce discrimination may enhance well-being. *—PTI*

Now is not the time for war, says PM to Putin, Zelenskyy

Putin, Zelenskyy invite PM to Russia, Ukraine after LS polls

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The separate telephonic conversations that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy is being seen as a fresh affirmation of how India is being seen as a peacemaker between the countries that are locked in a protracted military conflict, sources said.

During the telephonic conversation on Wednesday, Modi received invitations from Putin and Zelenskyy to visit the two countries amid the ongoing conflict, according to sources.

Modi reiterated India's stand on dialogue and diplomacy as a way for the resolution of the ongoing war against Ukraine, said an official release.

In conversation with Zelenskyy, Modi reiterated India's people-centric approach and called for dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Modi noted that India supports all efforts for an early and peaceful resolution of all issues between the parties.

Zelenskyy posted on X, "It will be important for us to see India attend the inaugural Peace Summit, which is currently being prepared in Switzerland. Ukraine is interested in strengthening our trade and economic ties with India, particularly in agricultural exports, aviation cooperation, and pharmaceutical and industrial product trade."

Zelenskyy appreciated India's continued humanitarian assistance for the people of Ukraine. The two leaders agreed to remain in touch.

The two leaders agreed to make concerted efforts towards further strengthening the Special & Privileged Strategic Partnership.

Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi and Volodymyr Zelenskyy **PHOTOS: ANI**

Meanwhile, the Kremlin also shared details of President Putin's conversation with Modi and said that the former informed the latter about the ongoing situation in the war-torn region of Ukraine.

Putin also emphasised Ukraine's refusal to take political and diplomatic steps to settle the conflict.

"In connection with the events of 24 June, Modi expressed understanding and support of the resolute actions by the Russian leadership to protect law and order and ensure stability in the country and security of its people," it added.

On 24 June, 2023, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the chief of the Wagner Group, led an armed rebellion against the Russian defence minister. The rebellion started in Rostov-on-Don, in southern Russia, and forces loyal to Prigozhin marched toward Moscow.

The rebellion was called off after Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko inter

Russia to deliver S-400 air defence missiles by 2026

Amid delays due to its ongoing military conflict with Ukraine, Russia has informed India that it would be able to supply the remaining two squadrons of the S-400 long-range air defence missile system by August 2026. *—PTI*

EC action, FIR against Shobha over 'bomb' jibe

MADURAI/BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Election Commission on Wednesday directed Karnataka chief electoral officer (CEO) to take immediate and appropriate action on the DMK's complaint about alleged model code violation by Union minister and BJP leader Shobha Karandlaje.

The poll panel also sought a compliance report on the matter within 48 hours.

During a protest in Bengaluru on Tuesday, she had said that "law and order in Karnataka has deteriorated. People who come from Tamil Nadu plant bombs here, people from Delhi chant 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans and people who come from Kerala were involved in acid attacks."

Madurai Police on Wednesday booked Karandlaje for "promoting enmity" between different groups. Her remarks drew criticism from Chief Minister MK Stalin.

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu approached Election Commission against Karandlaje, accusing her of violating the Model Code of Conduct and the Representation of People Act.

Shobha Karandlaje **PHOTO: ANI**

The BJP leader apologised for remarks and announced retracting them.

"To my Tamil brothers & sisters, I wish to clarify that my words were meant to shine light, not cast shadows. Yet I see that my remarks brought pain to some - and for that, I apologize. My remarks were solely directed towards those trained in the Krishnagiri forest, linked to the Rameshwaram Cafe blast. To anyone from Tamil Nadu effected (sic), from the depths of my heart, I ask your forgiveness," she said in a post on 'X' late on Tuesday.

—Salar News

India puts off PM visit to Bhutan over bad weather

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State visit to Bhutan has been postponed due to inclement weather conditions there and the new dates are being worked out by the two sides, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Wednesday. Modi was scheduled to visit Bhutan on 21-22 March as part of the Indian government's emphasis on its 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. *—ANI*

New India-made tank engines tested in Mysuru

NEW DELHI , 20 MARCH

Maiden test-firing of India's first indigenously-made 1,500 horsepower engine for Main Battle Tanks was conducted in Mysuru on Wednesday with Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane terming it as a "transformative moment" which will enhance the country's military capabilities. Aramane presided over the test-firing at BEML's Engine division in Mysuru complex on 20 March, a statement said. "The 1,500HP engine represents a paradigm shift in military propulsion systems, possessing cutting-edge features such as high power-to-weight ratio, operability in extreme conditions," it said. *—PTI*

BJP files EC plaint against Rahul over 'Shakti' comment

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

BJP on Wednesday approached the Election Commission (EC) to lodge a complaint against Rahul Gandhi's 'Shakti' remark for allegedly hurting Hindu religious sentiments. In the letter submitted to the poll commission, the BJP said that a call for fight against Shakti and spreading misinformation regarding the authenticity and independent functioning of the EVMs amounts to an 'assault on the dignity of women as well as goes against the ethics and values promoted by the Constitution of India'. *—PTI*

Metro guard suspended for misbehaving with women

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation (BMRCL) suspended an Assistant Section Officer on Wednesday for allegedly behaving inappropriately at Jalahalli Metro Station on 16 March.

A group of women employed in the security division of Namma Metro lodged complaints with the Metro authorities and Subramanyanagar police, alleging sexual harassment by their senior colleague Gajendra. The women said Gajendra used obscene language, made inappropriate physical contact and sexually harassed them. The Assistant Section Officer even threatened the victims with false charges and transfers if they objected to his behaviour, the complaint said.

City Police said that they had forwarded the complaint to the police officers concerned. They urged the public to dial emergency helpline number 112 in case of distress or emergencies.

This incident adds to recent cases of sexual harassment within the metro system. Previously, two female security guards stationed at Rajajinagar and Yeshwantpur metro stations accused an assistant divisional officer of sexually harassing them. Earlier in January, BMRCL invoking Metro Railways (Operation and Maintenance) Act, 2002, fined a male passenger of Rs 10,000 for misbehaving with a female passenger. *—Salar News*

HC STAYS ARREST WARRANT AGAINST RAHUL OVER REMARK ON AMIT SHAH

RANCHI, 20 MARCH

The Jharkhand High Court on Wednesday clamped a stay order on the operation of a non-bailable arrest warrant issued against senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi by a court in Chaibasa.

The court in Chaibasa had issued a non-bailable arrest warrant on 27 February against Gandhi for his non-appearance and participation in the trial of a defamation case. Later, Gandhi had challenged the order before High Court here. After hearing the matter, it imposed a stay of 30 days on the operation of the non-bailable arrest warrant. Gandhi had allegedly made a defamatory remark on Union Minister Amit Shah during a rally in Chaibasa before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Pratap Kumar o had filed the case against Gandhi for his remark. Kumar in his petition filed before the court of the magistrate in Chaibasa said Gandhi's statements were defamatory. *—PTI*

Nomination for 1st phase of LS polls begins

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The nomination process for 102 Parliamentary constituencies spread across 21 states and Union territories, where polling would be held in the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections on 19 April began on Wednesday with the issuance of a notification.

In the first phase, polling will be held in Arunachal Pradesh (2 seats), Assam (5), Bihar (4), Chhattisgarh (1), Madhya Pradesh (6), Maharashtra (5), Manipur (2), Meghalaya (2), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Rajasthan (12), Sikkim (1), Tamil Nadu (39), Tripura (1), Uttar Pradesh (8), Uttarakhand (5), West Bengal (3), Andaman and Nicobar (1), Jammu and Kashmir (1), Lakshadweep (1) and Puducherry (1). The last date for filing nomination papers is 27 March.

PHOTO: PTI

However, due to a festival, 28 March is the last date for filing nominations for the Lok Sabha seats in Bihar going to polls in the first phase. Voting in four out of 40 seats in Bihar will be held in the first phase.

The last date for withdrawal of candidature is 20 March while for Bihar, it is 2 April.

The elections for the 18th Lok Sabha will begin on 19 April followed by subsequent phases on 26 April, 7 May, 13 May, 20 May, 25 May and 1 June. The counting of votes is on 4 June.

In Itanagar, the state election office issued separate gazette notifications for holding elections to 60 Assembly constituencies and two Lok Sabha seats in Arunachal Pradesh.

EC asks state to remove unauthorised political ads

Cracking the whip, Election Commission on Wednesday asked state governments to take down all unauthorised political advertisements from government, public and private properties and send a compliance report in the next 24 hours.

In a letter to the Union Cabinet Secretary and chief secretaries of all states and union territories, the EC said that despite its letter issued on March 16 when the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections came into force, it has received complaints that such defacements have not been removed. *—PTI*

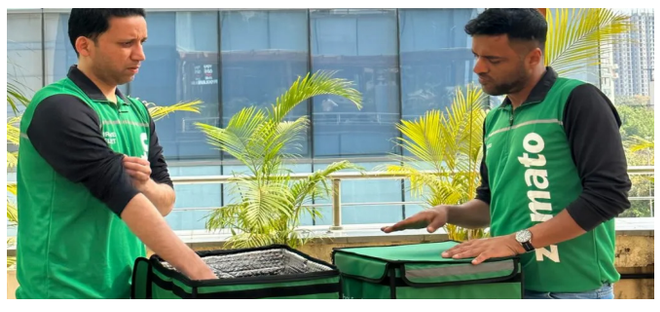
AMID ROW

Zomato scraps green uniform for Veg Fleet

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Amid a backlash over its policy to introduce a new "Pure Veg Mode" service, Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal on Wednesday said the company will roll back the move to introduce green uniform for its new fleet, clarifying that all its riders will continue to wear red.

Goyal was in the eye of a storm after the launch of a "Pure Veg Mode" service, intended for strictly vegetarian customers in India, to be delivered by a "Pure Veg Fleet". Netizens expressed concern over the move, saying that some societies and Resident welfare association (RWAs) may not allow Zomato's regular fleet to enter on the basis of the red-green colour segregation.



Zomato had said its 'Pure Veg' fleet would have delivery riders in green uniform with green delivery boxes **PHOTOS: PTI**

While we are going to continue to have a fleet for vegetarians, we have decided to remove the on-ground segregation of this fleet on the ground using the colour green. All our riders -- both our regular fleet, and our fleet for vegetarians, will wear the colour red," Goyal said on X. Goyal said this will ensure that Zomato's red uniform delivery partners are not incorrectly associated with non-veg food, and blocked by any RWAs or societies during any special days.

"I would like to repeat that this feature strictly serves a dietary preference. And I know there are a lot of customers who would never order food from a restaurant which serves meat, irrespective of their religion/caste," Goyal said.

—PTI

Complaint against Tejasvi Surya for hate speech

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

An activists' group "Campaign Against Hate Speech" from the City has filed a complaint against BJP MP Tejasvi Surya for alleged hate speech who is also a candidate for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The delegation first met with Tushar Girinath, District Election Officer, to lodge a complaint against him for purported violations of Section 123(a) of the Representation of People Act, the Model Code of Conduct, and sections 153(a), 295(a), and 505(2) of the Indian Penal Code. Additionally, they approached Halasuru police station to file the complaint, along with others. They also claimed that Surya and his people staged protest in unauthorised areas. The complaints stem from statements made by Surya on 18 March, 2024, via a social media platform, wherein he allegedly targeted the Muslim community and attempted to incite hatred between Hindu and Muslim communities. Surya's remarks accused Congress of fostering anti-Hindu sentiments and called for action against individuals involved in an alleged assault on a Hindu shopkeeper.

—Salar News

College asks students to clean debris, gets notice

KOLAR, 20 MARCH

Kolar Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI) has issued notices to Vice Principal and teachers of Government Junior College here for making students clear the debris on school premises. An old wall at the school was brought down to construct a sink unit. School authorities asked a few students of Class 9 to clear the debris and someone videographed the incident. A complaint was lodged against Vice Principal BM Radhamma, urging punishment under the provisions of Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act. DDPI Krishnamurthy said the school is over a hundred years old and the Vice Principal had taken up some developmental works for the benefit of the students. Using students to clear the debris is not acceptable and action will be taken against defaulters after getting explanations, the DDPI said..

—Salar News

Girl dies after catching fire due to lighting of lamp

TUMAKURU, 20 MARCH

A six-year-old girl, who caught fire while lighting a lamp in a temple, has succumbed to her burn injuries in Sira taluk of Tumakuru district.The victim was a Class I student at Melakote Government Senior Primary School in Tumakuru district. During lunch break, the girl went to a nearby temple to perform a ritual of lighting a lamp on 13 March. Her clothes accidentally caught fire, resulting in severe burn injuries. She was admitted to Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru and she succumbed to her injuries on Tuesday.—Salar News

Congress may win 17 seats in LS polls: Eedina survey

7 seats in State will witness neck-to-neck fights, predicts survey

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Congress is likely to win 17 out of 28 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka, according to a pre-poll survey conducted by Kannada news portal Eedina. BJP-JD(S) alliance will grab 11 seats, and in 7 seats there will be a neck-to-neck fight.

The survey took the opinion of 52,678 people across the State between 15 February and 5 March. In terms of vote share, the survey predicts that Congress is expected to receive 43.77% of the total votes, while BJP-JD(S) alliance is projected to receive 42.35%, indicating a closely fought election. If this prediction materialises, the Congress would see an 11.89 percentage points increase in its vote share compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, while the BJP's vote share would decline.

The survey also revealed that voters are concerned about rising prices, dwindling job opportunities, increased corruption and growing income inequality over the past decade. Despite these concerns, Narendra Modi continues to enjoy significant popularity, with 45% of respondents expressing support for a third term for him as Prime Minister. However, over half of the respondents (56%) indicated that they would vote in favour of the Congress' guarantee schemes, reflecting a preference for the party's welfare initiatives.

Moreover, a considerable portion of the electorate (39.6%) believes that State government schemes are more beneficial than those of the Union government, while 20% hold the opposite view, and 26% perceive benefits from both State and Union government schemes.

—Salar News

2019 Lok Sabha Elections (Vote Share)

1. BJP - 51.38%
2. Congress - 31.88%
3. JD(S) - 9.67%

2024 Lok Sabha Elections (Predicted Vote Share)

1. Congress - 43.77%
2. BJP-JD(S) alliance - 42.35%

.

Issues flagged by common people in 10-year Modi rule

1. **76.55%** feel the price of essential goods has increased
2. **53.18%** feel employment opportunities have reduced
3. **45.75%** feel corruption has increased.
4. **42.02%** feel the gap between rich and poor has increased.
5. **37.63%** of respondents feel welfare schemes have decreased.

EC CRACKS THE WHIP

Cash, liquor, freebies worth Rs 27 crore seized

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has seized more than Rs 27 crore worth of freebies, drugs, cash, and liquor in the State. A press release by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) highlighted various actions that have been taken to curb electoral malpractices. This includes cash seizures of Rs 2,93,50,000 in the Bijapur Parliamentary constituency and Rs 50,00,000 in the Ballari district.

A total of 205 FIRs have been registered by Flying Squads, SSTs, and police authorities for various violations. Additionally, 47,868 arms have been deposited, 827 arms impounded, and eight arms licenses are cancelled. Preventive action has been taken against 2,725 individuals.

The Excise Department has booked 249 heinous cases, 206 cases for breach of license conditions, and 13 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Further, 822 cases have been registered under the Karnataka Excise Act, and 156 vehicles have been seized.

A total of 1,740 calls were received through Voter Helpline, with 1,737 seeking information. Additionally, 6,943 complaints were registered on the National Grievance Services Portal (NGSP)portal.

The mobile application cVIGIL received 1,120 complaints, primarily related to unauthorized posters/banners, property defacement, and distribution of money or gifts. Out of these, 913 complaints were found to be valid, and action has been taken accordingly.

A total of 29 complaints were received through various media channels, including emails, letters, newspapers, TV channels, and social media. All complaints have been addressed and disposed of. Under the ENCORE application, 125 applications for permissions were received, with 65 accepted, 34 rejected, and 21 pending.

—Salar News

HITTING BACK

JD(S) leaders became PM, CM because of us, says DK Suresh

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

DK Suresh **PHOTO: PTI**

Bengaluru Rural Congress MP DK Suresh on Wednesday claimed that leaders of Janta Dal (Secular) became Prime Minister and Chief Minister because of Congress. "We gave them space in the history of the country and State," Suresh said.

Suresh was replying to the allegations of former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy that Congress had slit the throat of JD(S) and hence they joined BJP. "I am not going to answer Kumaraswamy's questions. I pray to God that he, who is admitted to the hospital because his health is not good, gets well soon. In politics, the stronger the opponents, the better they can work. Let him get well first," Suresh said.

Kumaraswamy on Tuesday said he would be going to Chennai for medical treatment and would not be available for five days.

About the crack in the BJP-JD(S) alliance, Suresh said, "Show people the statements that the former prime minister has said in the past such as 'I will be born a Muslim in the next life', 'If Modi wins, I will leave the country'', 'The State does not need national parties, it needs regional parties'," he said.Reacting to the Hanuman Chalisa controversy, "BJP is doing this thinking that the media will give publicity. The saffron party is known to blow things out of proportion for their benefits," he said.

—Salar News

Siddaramaiah doesn't have grip over his administration: CT Ravi

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

CT Ravi **PHOTO: PTI**

Siddaramaiah-led government is weak and he doesn't have a grip over his administration, said BJP National General Secretary CT Ravi on Wednesday. "Siddaramaiah has to tell his followers to convey to the public that he will be the Chief Minister for the next five years," said Ravi.

Ravi said law and order has worsened in the State after Congress came to power. "The harassment of women has not only gone up but parading naked women has also become the new norm. There is a blast in Rameshwaram Cafe and playing Hanuman Chalisa has also become a reason for riots in this State. Do we need more proofs than these?" he questioned.

About Siddaramaiah calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a 'weak PM' and labelling himself a 'strong CM', Ravi said, "He who calls himself strong is weak. It is not just our leaders and workers who said Modiji is a strong leader, the top leaders of the world also endorsed it."

Ravi claimed that Prime Minister of Israel called Modi the most popular leader and that 11 countries of the world have given their country's highest award to Modi.

The former Union minister said it was Modi who freed retired naval officers who were on death row in Qatar and brought them back safely. "During the Ukraine-Russia war, a 48-hour ceasefire was held and more than 23,000 Indian students were safely brought back to the country. Similarly, the Centre has safely brought back Indians from Syria, Israel, Sudan, Afghanistan and other countries during crisis," he said.

Before 2014, global rating companies rated India as one of the five weakest economies in the world. "But now, the country has become 5th strongest economy and in a couple of years, we will step up to the third position," he said.

—Salar News

ESHWARAPPA: WILL WIN LS POLLS ON MY OWN

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Senior BJP leader and former deputy chief minister, KS Eshwarappa, who is contesting as an independent candidate from Shivamogga constituency, said on Wednesday that he would emerge victorious in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He also predicted that State BJP President BY Vijayendra would lose his position following the announcement of election results.

Eshwarappa, who is challenging BJP candidate BY Raghavendra in Shivamogga, alleged that BJP had assured him of compensatory positions for himself and his son in exchange for his independent candidacy. He claimed that BJP promised to appoint his son as a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) and offer him the position of Governor.

KE Kantesh, Eshwarappa's son, said his father's decision to contest independently resonated with the sentiments of party workers in Shivamogga. Kantesh criticised the BJP's decision not to nominate his father and expressed his disappointment over the party's treatment.

Eshwarappa held a meeting with his supporters in Shivamogga, urging them to rally behind him during the nomination and start campaigning in the wards.

Senior BJP leader BS Yediyurappa refuted Eshwarappa's accusations and defended the party's decision not to nominate Eshwarappa's son. Yediyurappa said Vijayendra's appointment as State President was endorsed by the party's high command and denied allegations of favouritism. He expressed hope that Eshwarappa would understand the truth and reconcile with the party in the future.

—Salar News

Visit senior citizens' houses for postal votes: BBMP to officials

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) on Wednesday ordered booth-level officials to visit the houses of people aged above 85 years and those with more than 40 per cent physical disability to facilitate voting through postal ballots for Lok Sabha elections.The officials are to visit the houses of voters in the constituencies of Bengaluru North, Bengaluru South and Bengaluru Central which come under the jurisdiction of District Election Office. The officials should fill out Form 12D and submit it to the officials concerned which enables people to vote from their houses. *—Salar News*

EVERY DROP MATTERS

People line up to get water from a water tanker at New Guddadahalli in Bengaluru on Wednesday. **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Ban on using Cauvery water for Holi festival

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has issued an order prohibiting using Cauvery water and borewell water for pool parties and rain dances during Holi festival. This decision comes amid the water crisis faced by Bengaluru and aims to conserve water resources in the city. Earlier this month, BWSSB also banned the use of drinking water for non-essential purposes like cleaning vehicles, gardening, and recreation. Violation of the BWSSB order attracts a penalty of Rs 5,000. Despite the restrictions, some establishments are planning to host Holi events with pool parties. However, they claim to be using stored groundwater for these events to avoid using drinking water. For example, Hotel Davanam Sarovar Portico Suites on Hosur Road told Salar News that they will not have rain dance but will proceed with the pool party using stored groundwater.

Similarly, 'Rang De Bengaluru,' an open-air Holi party at Gokulam Grand Hotel and Spa in Jalahalli, said they harvest rainwater for the event and will use it instead of Cauvery water or borewell water. They assured that they would make necessary changes if the government raised any concerns.

However, some Holi events, like the Whitefield Biggest Holi Festival at Aloft Bengaluru, have opted to remove rain dance from their celebrations this year and plan to focus solely on celebrating with colours.

On Monday, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said of the required quantity of water for Bengaluru, 1,470 million litres per day (MLD) of water are sourced from Cauvery river, while an additional 650 MLD is sourced from borewells. However, due to severe water shortage, 6,900 borewells out of the 14,000 in the City have dried up.

—Salar News

14 dried-up lakes filled with treated water

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

- BWSSB has called for Expression of Interest from corporates to undertake projects using innovative technologies aimed at improving the water situation in Bengaluru

The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) is undertaking a significant initiative to address the water crisis in the City by filling 14 dried-up lakes with treated water.

This project aims to enhance the groundwater level and alleviate the drinking water shortage in the City. The 14 lakes currently being filled with treated water by BWSSB include Vengaian Lake, Yelemallappa Chetti Kere Lake, Halasuru Lake, Sarakki Lake, Agram Lake, Hulimavu Lake, Chikkabegur Lake, Madivala Lake, Jakkur Lake, Allasandra Lake, Kalkere Lake, Chikkabanavara Lake, Nayandahalli Lake, and Madavara Lake.

These lakes will have a combined capacity of 316 MLD (Million Liters per Day) of treated water. In addition to this initiative, BWSSB has also called for Expression of Interest from corporates to undertake projects using innovative technologies aimed at improving the water situation in Bengaluru. These projects will focus on various aspects such as the development of bio-retention systems, preservation of rainwater, natural filtration in Storm Water Drains, and integration of green infrastructure with water and sewage treatment plants.

This decision comes after the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 18 March instructed officials to prioritise the refilling of major lakes to increase the groundwater level.

—Salar

AMNESTY SCHEME

20K Indians to return from Kuwait

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

More than 20,000 Indians staying illegally in Kuwait, including hundreds hailing from Mangaluru and Dakshina Kannada district, are set to make use of the amnesty scheme announced by Kuwait government. The amnesty scheme for residency violators, which coincides with Ramadan, is effective from 17 March to 17 June.

Diplomatic sources at the Indian Embassy in Kuwait told Salar News that the diplomatic mission has received a large number of applications and queries regarding the amnesty scheme announced by the Kuwaiti government. The embassy said it is prioritising the issuance of emergency certificates (a one-way travel document to travel to India in the absence of a valid Indian passport).

"Most of the applicants to avail the amnesty are those who have run away from their original sponsors to work elsewhere illegally in Kuwait. There are others whose salaries have not been paid by their employers and they went absconding," an official at the Indian Diplomatic mission told Salar News.

In a post on social media platform X, the embassy urged Indians seeking assistance to reach out via these numbers: +965 65501767 and +965 65501769.

Under the amnesty scheme, expatriates residing unlawfully in the country are now allowed to rectify their status by either paying fines and obtaining new residency or leaving the country without fines. The expats illegally residing in Kuwait can regularise their status by settling fines of 2 KD (Kuwaiti Dinar which amounts to Rs. 550) per day up to a maximum of 600 KD (Rs.1.6 lakh)

According to the advisory by the Kuwait Interior Ministry, anyone unable to pay a fine can depart from the exit point without penalties but will have to follow new procedures if they wish to return to Kuwait. The Kuwaiti government said failure to comply with these orders during the amnesty will result in deportation as well as legal penalties.

Residents facing administrative obstacles or legal challenges have the option to appeal to the Residency Affairs Department for assessment. The last amnesty period was granted in early 2021.

—Salar News

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

PHOTO: X

Assam MP withdraws resignation after meeting Kharge

GUWAHATI, 20 MARCH

Assam MP **Abdul Khaleque**, who had recently resigned from Congress, on Wednesday withdrew it after a meeting with party President Mallikaarjun Kharge in New Delhi. The Barpeta MP in a letter to Kharge said that the party's central leadership reached out to him after his resignation. He had fruitful discussions with General Secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal and later had the blessings of Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi. 'Strengthening the Congress is the need of the hour, hence I withdraw my resignation and wish to work under your and Rahul Gandhi's able leadership,' he said in the letter, which was made available to the media. Khaleque had resigned on 15 March alleging non-redressal of his grievances by state party president Bhupen Borah and AICC state in-charge Jitendra Singh. *—PTI*

Delhi HC seeks ED response on Kejriwal's plea

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought a response from Enforcement Directorate (ED) on a plea moved by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal against several summons issued to him by ED in Excise policy case. The bench of Justice Suresh Kumar Kait and Justice Manoj Jain after hearing the initial submissions of both sides, listed the matter for 22 April, 2024. No formal notice was issued as ED opposed the issuance of formal notice as lawyers of ED appeared before the court on advance notice. During the hearing, the bench asked the Kejriwal lawyers, "You are a citizen of the country, the summons is by name only. Why don't you appear before Enforcement Directorate?" On the issue, Singhvi said that AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh were also arrested by the agency. *—ANI*

Malegaon blast: Court stays warrant against BJP LS MP

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

A special court in Mumbai on Wednesday stayed the execution of a bailable warrant issued against BJP Lok Sabha MP Pragya Singh Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case of Maharashtra, after it was informed that she has taken ill and admitted in a hospital here for treatment. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) court also noted that the warrant was not served on Thakur and directed her to appear before it on 27 March for recording statement.The court had on 11 March issued a bailable warrant of Rs 10,000 against the Lok Sabha member from Bhopal for failing to appear before it despite repeated warnings. *—PTI*

Buzz in Kerala over Jayarajan's family's business

T'PURAM, 20 MARCH

Tensions escalated in the Lok Sabha election campaign in Kerala over allegations regarding a business partnership between ruling LDF convener E P Jayarajan's family and BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar's company. Amidst this, an FIR was filed against a local Congress leader on the basis of a complaint by Jayarajan's wife alleging morphing of her photographs, while Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly V D Satheesan added fuel to the fire with fresh accusations against the LDF convener. Jayarajan on Wednesday levelled serious allegations of morphing photographs and playing "dirty politics" against Satheesan, who refuted the same. *—PTI*

DMK vows to repeal CAA if INDIA is voted to power

They said petrol, diesel prices will be set at Rs 75, Rs 65/litre

CHENNAI, 20 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK chief MK Stalin with party leaders TR Baalu, Kanimozhi, A Raja and others releases the party's candidates' list and manifesto during a party meeting, in Chennai on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK, a key constituent of the INDIA bloc, in its manifesto released on Wednesday promised to repeal the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 if Opposition alliance wins Lok Sabha polls.

Restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and holding polls there, scrapping the New Education Policy 2020, slashing fuel prices, annulling Article 361 of the Constitution that provides protection to governors from legal action and appointment of Governors following consultation with Chief Ministers, were among the key promises made by DMK. The recommendations of the MS Swaminathan committee will be adopted to ensure that MSP for agricultural products "is set at total production cost plus 50 per cent," DMK said.

Also, it announced that if voted to power, the INDIA bloc will withdraw the Agnipath scheme and reintroduce "permanent recruitment service" in the Indian Armed forces.

DMK will firmly insist on the removal of Article 356, which allows the dismissal of duly elected state governments and imposition of President's rule. Congress's ally in Tamil Nadu said that "new constraints" on States' borrowing capacity, imposed by the union government beyond the limits in each state's FRBM-equivalent Act will be eliminated.

"A recommendation to share cess revenues with states will be made. It will be proposed that the Finance Commission increase the horizontal devolution of tax revenue (to all States together) from 42 per cent to 50 per cent." The Union government's financial contributions to states will be based on the income tax and GST collected in those states. Thus, financial contributions will be assured based on the taxes collected within each state. The finance provided to states will be permanently determined based on the 1971 population.

A 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and legislative assemblies will be implemented immediately. "DMK will insist that the Union government enact a law providing menstrual leave to women, emphasising the journey towards gender equality."

Petrol and diesel prices "will be set at Rs 75, Rs 65 (per litre)" and cooking gas cylinders shall be made available at Rs 500 (per cylinder). "The introduction of the Uniform Civil Code will be strictly prevented" to preserve India's secular nature as stated in the Constitution's preamble.

The proposal of 'One Nation, One Election' will be abandoned, and for the allocation of Lok Sabha seats to states, the current practice, based on the 1971 census will continue.

The number of working days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act will be increased from 100 to 150 days. *—PTI*

NAMES 16 CANDIDATES

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and DMDK general secretary Premalatha Vijayakanth address the media on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

AIADMK seals pact with DMDK for LS elections

CHENNAI, 20 MARCH

Tamil Nadu's main Opposition AIADMK on Wednesday finalised a seat sharing arrangement for the Lok Sabha polls with DMDK, founded by actor-politician 'Captain' Vijayakanth who passed away recently.

Meanwhile, AIADMK released its first list of 16 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections 2024.

The AIADMK general secretary also said the party wasn't disappointed with not striking an alliance with the PMK which had joined the BJP alliance on Tuesday.The list was released by the party General Secretary, Edappadi K Palaniswami.

While releasing the list, he said that five constituencies have been allocated to the DMDK; and one each to Puthiya Tamilagam and SDPI.

"In AIADMK alliance, DMDMK is to contest in 5 seats, SDPI in 1 seat and Puthiya Tamilagam in 1 seat, from Tenkasi constituency," Palaniswami said.

This time AIADMK has the support of the SDPI, Tamil Manila Muslim League, Manitha Neya Jananayaga Katchi and Puthiya Tamilagam.

Tamil Nadu is voting on 19 April in a single phase of polling. During the 2019 general elections, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led Secular Progressive Alliance, which comprised INC, VCK, MDMK, CPI, CPI(M), IUML, MMK, KMDK, TVK, AIFB, registered a landslide victory by winning 38 of the 39 seats.

DMDK General Secretary Premalatha Vijayakanth described the AIADMK as a "natural ally." She said a "big victory alliance" has again been formed, like the one ahead of the 2011 Assembly polls.

"This victory alliance will continue in 2026 Assembly polls also," she revealed.

On DMK making several assurances in its manifesto for the LS polls, Palaniswami asked if the ruling party has fulfilled promises made ahead of the 2019 Parliamentary election and the 2021 Assembly polls. *—ANI/ PTI*

Suspended BSP leader Danish Ali joins Cong

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Danish Ali **PHOTO: PTI**

Suspended BSP leader and Lok Sabha MP Danish Ali joined Congress on Wednesday in the presence of senior party leaders.

After joining Congress here, he said that going by the prevailing situation in the country, it is important to join the grand old party in the fight against "divisive" forces.

"On one side are divisive forces and on the other are those forces fighting to get 'nyay' (justice) for the poor and oppressed sections of society, and the choice is very clear," Ali said.

"If we have to fight with divisive forces, then one has to strengthen the Congress under the leadership of Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi," he said.

Ali, who is the sitting MP from Amroha in Uttar Pradesh, was suspended by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) for anti-party activities.

He is set to contest the Lok Sabha polls from the Amroha Constituency on a Congress ticket.

AICC in-charge for Uttar Pradesh Avinash Pande, who was also present at the joining event, welcomed Ali in the party fold.

Pande said the party would benefit with the joining of Danish Ali, who has been in politics from his student days. Ali had also joined the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in UP and Manipur.

Ali was earlier with the Janata Dal (S) and had been the former Rajya Sabha MP from Karnataka. *—PTI*

Pappu Yadav joins Congress, merges his outfit

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Jan Adhikar party leader Pappu Yadav joined Congress on Wednesday and announced the merger of his outfit.

A former five-time MP from Bihar, Yadav is the husband of Congress Rajya Sabha MP Ranjeet Ranjan and is known for having influence in Seemanchal area of the eastern state.

He was accompanied by his son Sarthak Ranjan and other party leaders as he announced his decision at the AICC headquarters.

Yadav said Congress leadership gave him respect and he was joining the party's fight against "dictatorship" in the country to help save democracy. "The honour that the entire Congress family has given is enough for us. If anyone has won the hearts of people in India, it is Rahul Gandhi and people love him," he said. *—PTI*

Chirag Paswan **PHOTO: PTI**

Chirag Paswan to contest from Hajipur against Paras

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Lok Janshakti Party leader Chirag Paswan on Wednesday asserted that he will be contesting from Hajipur, against his Uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras, in upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"It is certain that I will be the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) candidate, the NDA candidate, from Hajipur - which was the 'karmabhoomi' of my father. Pashupati Kumar Paras is also welcome. I have bravely faced all challenges. I have never been scared of any challenges. I accept this challenge too," Paswan said while speaking to media on Wednesday.

On competing against his own uncle, Paswan remarked, "This isn't merely a political choice for me; it also holds implications for my family. Such decisions should not only be made by political parties but should also consider the sentiments of all family members. Previously, the decision to separate from the family was Pashupathi Paras' alone, and it continues to be his decision," Paswan said.

In preparations ahead of Lok Sabha elections, Lok Janshakti party held a parliamentary meeting under the leadership of Paswan. *—PTI*

Centre defends dropping CJI from EC draft panel

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Centre on Wednesday defended in the Supreme Court the appointment of two new election commissioners (ECs) under a 2023 law that excludes the Chief Justice of India from the selection committee, saying the independence of the Election Commission does not arise from the presence of a judicial member on the committee.

In an affidavit filed in the apex court, the Union Law Ministry rejected the petitioner's claim that the two election commissioners were hastily appointed on 14 March to "pre-empt" the orders of the top court the next day, when the matters challenging the 2023 law were listed for hearing on interim relief.

The affidavit has been filed in response to a batch of pleas, including those by Congress leader Jaya Thakur and the Association for Democratic Reforms, challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Terms of Office) Act, 2023.

"It is submitted that the case of the petitioners is premised on one fundamental fallacy that the independence can only be maintained in any authority when the selection committee is of a particular formulation," the affidavit said. *—PTI*

SC to hear Kavitha's plea challenging her arrest

New Delhi, 20 March

The Supreme Court will hear BRS leader K Kavitha's plea challenging her arrest in money laundering case relating to Delhi excise policy irregularities matter on 22 March. Justices Sanjiv Khanna with MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi will head the bench. Kavitha, through her advocate P Mohith Rao, has moved Supreme Court on Monday challenging her arrest by Enforcement Directorate (ED). Kavitha, who was arrested by an ED team on 15 March, is in custodial interrogation for seven days till 23 March. *—ANI*

SOUNDARARAJAN REJOINS BJP AFTER QUITTING AS GUV

CHENNAI, 20 MARCH

Former Telangana Governor, Tamilisai Soundararjan on Wednesday rejoined the BJP in the presence of Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai.

Annamalai, referring to "criticism against Tamilisai Soundararajan by Left parties and the DMK" for joining the BJP after holding the office of Governor, said persons holding exalted posts quitting office to start working again for the public as an ordinary person is possible only in the BJP.

A person belonging to a political party other than the BJP will not quit high offices. For them, being in politics is meant only to assume top positions.

She functioned very well as Governor. Quitting that position and joining politics again shows Soundararajan's love for the people.

Her joining the BJP again shows her commitment to the party; her determination that her work should also contribute to strengthening the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he assumes office for a third time in a row.

Soundararajan resigned from the BJP before assuming the office of Governor of Telangana in 2019.

She was appointed Lt Governor of Puducherry in 2021.

Soundararjan,62, is a gynaecologist and she joined the BJP over two decades ago. *—PTI*

CONG APPROACHES DELHI HC AGAINST TAX RE-ASSESSMENT PROCEEDINGS

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Congress on Wednesday contested in the Delhi High Court the tax reassessment proceedings initiated against it by the Income Tax department (I-T) for three successive years till 2016-17, claiming they were barred by limitation.

The I-T department, however, asserted there was no violation of any statutory provision by the tax authority. The court reserved its order on the pleas filed by the Congress party and is likely to pronounce it in the next couple of days.

"You will get the order by tomorrow or the day after," a bench of Justices Yashwant Varma and Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav said after hearing the lawyers representing the Congress and the I-T Department.

The court was hearing Congress' pleas against reassessment proceedings for three years 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing the Congress party, submitted that tax reassessment proceedings are barred by limitation and the I-T department could have gone back to a maximum of six assessment years.

He said the reassessment proceedings are being done in violation of the provisions of the Income Tax Act. Advocate Zoheb Hossain, appearing for the I-T department, said there has been no violation of the statutory provisions by the authorities, and as per the material recovered, the "escaped" income by the party is more than Rs 520 crore. *—PTI*

ONLINE CONTENT

Centre notifies fact check unit under PIB

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Centre on Wednesday notified the fact check unit under the Press Information Bureau (PIB) to monitor online content pertaining to the government for accuracy. The fact check unit has been notified under IT Rules of 2021 by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

"Central government hereby notifies the Fact Check Unit under the Press Information Bureau of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as the fact check unit of the Central Government for the purposes of the said subclause, in respect of any business of the Central Government," the notification said.

The fact check unit has been notified under IT Rules of 2021 by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology **PHOTO: PTI**

The Fact Check Unit will be the nodal agency to tackle or alert about all fake news or misinformation related to the central government. The notification came days after the Bombay High Court declined to restrain the Centre from notifying the unit. The petition was filed by stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and the Editors Guild of India.

The petitioners have moved Supreme Court against Bombay High Court verdict and the matter is expected to come up for hearing on Thursday.

In April last year, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) promulgated the 2023 Rules, which further amended the Information Technology Rules, 2021.

Under the new rules, if the fact check unit comes across or is informed about any posts that are "fake", "false" or contain "misleading" facts pertaining to the business of the government, it would flag it to the social media intermediaries. *—ANI*

ICAI announces rescheduled dates of CA exam

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has rescheduled its exam dates in view of the Lok Sabha elections, according to officials. While the chartered accountant exams will be conducted in the month of May as decided earlier, the dates have been rejigged. According to the revised schedule, the intermediate course exam for Group 1 will be held on 3, 5 and 9 May. Earlier, the exam was scheduled on 3, 5 and 7 May. For Group 2, the intermediate course exam will be held on 11, 15 and 17 May. Earlier, the exam was planned on 9, 11 and 13 May. For the final exams, the ICAI has announced 2, 4 and 8 May for Group 1 which was earlier scheduled on 2, 4 and 6 May. For the Group 2, the exam will be held on 10, 14 and 16 May which was earlier supposed to be conducted on 8, 10 and 12 May. The decision to was taken after the Election Commission announced the schedule of elections for – June 2024.—*PTI*

UP man rapes minor, posts video online

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 20 MARCH

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a man who posted the video of the act online, police here said on Wednesday. Circle Officer (CO) Rajkumar Sav said the accused, Waseem, allegedly raped the victim two weeks ago in a sugarcane field and made a video of the act.According to the complaint filed by the victim's family, Waseem threatened the girl of sharing the video on social media if she informed anyone about the incident. "The accused had forced the girl into a sugarcane field and raped her. —*PTI*

2 of Elvish Yadav's aides held in snake venom case

NOIDA, 20 MARCH

Noida Police on Wednesday arrested two associates of YouTuber Elvish Yadav over its probe into suspected use of snake venoms as recreational drugs in parties, officials said.The arrest of the duo comes close on the heels of the police nabbing Yadav on Sunday after questioning him in the case. The duo's name had not featured in the original First Information Report (FIR), lodged at the Sector 49 Police Station in Noida on 3 November, but their links in the case surfaced during the investigation, a senior officer said. "Those arrested have been identified as Ishwar,50, and Vinay Yadav,25,Ishwar runs a banquet hall in Gurugram while Vinay is a social media influencer and close friend of Elvish," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Shakti Mohan Avasthy said.—*PTI*

4 kids in Manipur relief camp drown in river

CHURACHANDPUR, 20 MARCH

Four children, who were living in a relief camp along with their families, drowned in a river in Manipur's Churachandpur district, police said. The children -- three girls and a boy, aged between four and nine -- were living in the ECA Canan relief camp in Tuibuong due to the ethnic strife in the state, they said. They went to take bath at the Tuitha river near their camp around 2pm on Tuesday. As they did not come back for a long, their families along with other inmates of the camp started looking for them. The police were also informed, and they too joined the searches, which continued overnight. Around 6am on Wednesday, the bodies of the children were found in the river, police said.—*PTI*

Strike, rally in Ladakh over demand of statehood

Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike enters 15th day

KARGIL, 20 MARCH

Shops and business establishments were closed as thousands of people marched on Wednesday in support of their demand for statehood and Ladakh's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Separately, the hunger strike by climate activist Sonam Wangchuk in Leh to "remind" the BJP-led Centre of its promise to safeguard the Union Territory's fragile ecology and unique indigenous tribal culture entered its 15th day.

Responding to a call from the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which announced a half-day strike and a protest rally in the town to express solidarity with Wangchuk, a large number of people took out a rally from Fatima Chowk to Hussaini Park via the main market and raised slogans demanding statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule.

All shops and business establishments remained closed while those taking part in the procession held up banners, some of which read "Ladakh demands statehood and Sixth Schedule" and "Save Ladakh, Save Democracy".

The KDA leadership addressed a huge gathering at Hussaini Park and urged the people to prepare for a long struggle **PHOTO: PTI**

The Apex Body, Leh (ABL), and the KDA -- both separate groupings of various political, social and religious organisations representing the two districts -- are jointly spearheading the agitation for various demands.

The provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave a special status to Jammu and Kashmir, were abrogated on 5 August, 2019, and the erstwhile state was bifurcated into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The KDA leadership addressed a huge gathering at Hussaini Park and urged the people to prepare for a long struggle following the failure of its talks with the Centre.

- The Apex Body, Leh (ABL), and the KDA -- both separate groupings of various political, social and religious organisations representing the two districts -- are jointly spearheading the agitation

They also announced the commencement of a hunger strike in Kargil from 24 March.

Asgar Ali Karbalai, the KDA's co-chairman said that people of Ladakh are determined to carry forward the struggle for their rights.

Karbalai said the KDA leadership is leaving for Leh on Thursday and will meet the ABL leadership to chalk out a joint strategy and roadmap to carry forward the agitation with more vigour.

"We are united and the people of Kargil will always remain in the forefront of the agitation," he said.

In Leh, Wangchuk said he is fine surviving on just water and salts. —*PTI*

IN MONEY LAUNDERING CASES

Can't keep accused in custody without trial: SC raps ED

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Keeping an accused in custody without trial is akin to detention which hampers liberty, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday while deprecating the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) practice of filing supplementary chargesheets in money laundering cases to defeat the accused's right of getting default bail.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta took exception to the ED filing four supplementary chargesheets, the latest on 1 March, 2024, in a money laundering case arising from alleged illegal mining in Jharkhand.

The top court was hearing the default bail plea of Prem Prakash, an alleged associate of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren. Prakash was arrested in August, 2022 after raids during which two AK-47 rifles, 60 live rounds and two magazines were claimed to have been found at his home in Ranchi. He was booked for the offences of money laundering and under the Arms Act.

The bench told Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, about the investigation in the case still continuing despite four supplementary chargesheets having been filed.

"We are putting you (ED) on notice. (Under the law) You cannot arrest a person without the investigation in the case being complete. A person cannot be put in custody without the commencement of trial. It is akin to detention and affects the liberty of an individual. In some cases, we have to settle this issue," the bench told Raju.

Justice Khanna said an accused cannot be denied the benefit of default bail by filing supplementary chargesheets.

Justice Khanna said the petitioner has been behind bars for 18 months and supplementary chargesheets are being filed one after the other, which is eventually delaying the trial. —*PTI*

SC to hear against parties giving freebies

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court agreed to list for hearing on Thursday a Public Interest Litigation(PIL) against the practice of political parties promising freebies during elections, a significant development that comes ahead of general elections beginning 19 April.

The PIL also seeks a direction to the Election Commission to invoke its powers to freeze the election symbols and cancel the registration of such political parties.

The apex court took note of the submissions of senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for lawyer and PIL petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay, that the plea needs to be heard before the Lok Sabha polls.

The plea said there should be a total ban on populist measures to gain undue political favour from voters as they violate the Constitution, and the EC should take suitable deterrent measures.

It also urged the court to declare that the promise of irrational freebies from public funds before elections unduly influences the voters, disturbs the level playing field and vitiates the purity of the poll process.

"Petitioner submits that the recent trend of political parties to influence voters by offering freebies with an eye on elections is not only the greatest threat to the survival of democratic values but also injures the spirit of the Constitution," said the plea.

"This unethical practice is just like giving bribes to the electorate at the cost of the exchequer to stay in power and must be avoided to preserve democratic principles and practices," it said.

The petitioner has urged the apex court to declare that the promise or distribution of private goods or services, which are not for public purposes from public funds, before the elections violates several articles of the Constitution, including Article 14. —*PTI*

STONE PELTING ON PROCESSION KILLS 1 IN RAJASTHAN

JAIPUR, 20 MARCH

Tension prevailed in a locality in Rajasthan's Chittorgarh after around a dozen people were injured allegedly in stone pelting on a religious procession on Tuesday night, officials said.

A man, who was given primary treatment, died late night apparently because of heart attack.

The incident took place in the Raashmi police station area where a religious procession was being taken out at night. A dispute occurred when some men allegedly raised objection over the procession passing by a mosque.

After an altercation, they allegedly started pelting stones in which around a dozen people were injured.

Collector Alok Ranjan said that the injured were given primary treatment but later a man died and heart attack is primarily stated to be the cause of his death. The deceased was identified as Shyam Lal Chhipa. —*PTI*

BUDAUN DOUBLE MURDER

Barber murders 2 kids in UP, gunned down by cops in encounter

BUDAUN, 20 MARCH

The man who brutally murdered two children at their home in Budaun knew the family and had gone there seeking money for payment to a hospital where his pregnant wife is admitted, according to the First Information Report (FIR) lodged on the matter.

Hours after the murder, the accused Sajid,22, was gunned down in an encounter with the police, IG Bareilly range RK Singh told PTI on Wednesday.

A man who had recently opened a barber shop in the locality entered the house and attacked three brothers -- Ayush,12, Ahaan alias Honey, 8, and Yuvraj, 10, with a knife. Ayush and Ahaan died in the attack, while Yuvraj was rushed to a hospital with grievous wounds.

As per the FIR lodged after a complaint by the deceased's father Vinod Kumar, accused Sajid and his brother Javed reached the house at around 7pm on Tuesday.

Police personnel and locals outside the residence of two boys who were killed by a local barber, in Budaun, on Wednesday **PHOTO:PTI**

"Sajid told my wife Sangeeta that he needed Rs 5,000 which is required for the delivery of his wife. When my wife went inside to get the money, Sajid went to the roof of the house. Moments later, Javed also reached the roof and they called my two sons Ayush, 12, Ahaan alias Honey, 8 on the roof," reads the FIR.

Police have not clarified about the whereabouts of Javed. Police have also not confirmed the motive behind the incident.

Police have booked both Javed and Sajid for murder (under IPC Section 302 IPC) in the FIR. —*PTI*

Man beaten, forced to drink urine for eloping with woman

UJJAIN, 20 MARCH

A man was allegedly beaten up, forced to drink urine and wear a garland of shoes after he eloped with a married woman in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain district, prompting the police to initiate action into the incident.

Some videos of the incident went viral on social media but no complaint has been lodged by the man so far, police said on Wednesday.

In one of the videos, the man is seen wearing a garland of shoes and drinking a liquid, believed to be urine, from a bottle as some people shout at him and force him to consume it. He is also seen being beaten up by a woman, with whom he had allegedly eloped.

Some videos of the incident went viral on social media but no complaint has been lodged by the man so far **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Another video showed the man licking a shoe held in his hand and being forced to put another shoe on his head.

In the clips, the man is seen with half of his moustache and parts of head shaved off.

Asked about it, Additional Superintendent of Police Nitesh Bhargava told reporters that they have taken cognisance of the video clips, which are three-four days old, and contacted the victim.

"After the videos came to the notice of the police, we proactively contacted the victim's home but he was not present there," he said.

"I have spoken to the victim over the phone and he will be meeting me. After verification of the accused and the place of the incident, legal action will be initiated," he said.

On the reason behind the incident, the official said it is not yet clear and will be confirmed after talking to the victim."We proactively contacted the victim but no complaint has been made so far," he said.

According to sources, the issue was about the man eloping with a married woman from the Banjara community of Bhilkhedi village under Bhatpachlana police station limits, some 75 km from the district headquarters. —*PTI*

4 succumb to injuries from Rewari blast

REWARI, 20 MARCH

Four workers injured in a boiler blast at a spare parts manufacturing facility in the district have died, while the condition of more than 10 others was critical, police said on Wednesday.

While three of them died at the PGIMS hospital in Rohtak on Tuesday night, died at Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital, Inspector Jagdish Chander said.

The deceased have been identified as Ajay, 32, Vijay,37, Ramu,27, Rajesh,38, all residents of Uttar Pradesh.

The blast took place at the manufacturing facility in Dharuhera industrial area on Saturday.

A senior police officer said 40 workers had suffered burn injuries in the incident. Of these, 10 workers were admitted to the Rewari Trauma Centre, more than 20 workers to PGIMS Rohtak, four to the Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi and others in Dharuhera here.

Five workers were later discharged from hospital.

Police on Sunday had registered a case in connection with the boiler blast.

The contractor and others have been booked in the case. —*PTI*

Police gets 10 more days to end Newsclick probe

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Delhi House Court on Wednesday granted 10 days more time to Delhi Police to complete the investigation in The NewsClick case.

The probe in against Founder and Editor-in-Chief Prabir Purkayastha and HR Head of News Portal Amit Chakravarty in a case registered under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, following allegations that News Portal NewsClick received huge money for pro-China propaganda.

Earlier, the court extended the investigation period twice on the request of the Delhi Police.

Delhi Police, through Special Public Prosecutor Advocate Akhand Pratap Singh, earlier submitted that it has taken prompt steps to conduct the probe and a large number of data has been retrieved, which is being checked.

There are nearly 4 lakh emails and more than 100 digital documents and one of the accused is residing outside India.

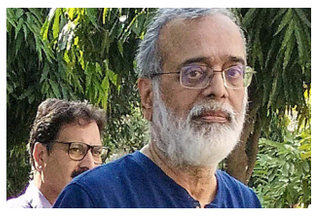


PHOTO: PTI

In October last year, police arrested Purkayastha and Chakraborty under the provisions of UAPA. Both accused are presently in judicial custody. Recently, the court allowed Chakravarty to turn approver in the case.

The approver, an accomplice who decides to testify against the co-accused in exchange for a pardon, is subject to examination and treatment under the CrPC. —*PTI*

DAD ALLEGES HARASSMENT

Govt notice over Sidhu's IVF born brother

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has sought a report from the Government of Punjab regarding the In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) treatment of Sidhu Moosewala's mother, Charan Kaur, and asked them to submit the report to the department.

"Under Section 21(g) (i) of the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, the age limit prescribed for a woman going under ART Services is between 21-50 years," the notice reads.

Recently, parents of the late Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala, Balkaur Singh, and Charan Kaur welcomed a baby boy on Sunday, almost two years after the singer was killed in Punjab.

In a video posted on Facebook, Moosewala's father Balkaur Singh said he had all legal documents and was greatly troubled by this enquiry.

Recently, parents of the late Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala, Balkaur Singh, and Charan Kaur welcomed a baby boy **PHOTO: X**

" Government is now troubling me asking me to prove his legal status. I want to request the Chief Minister (Bhagwant Mann) that please let me get the treatment done with then I will come wherever the government calls me. I am an ex-Army man; I will never run away from the law. I have all the legal documents and I will prove it. However, if the state does not believe me they can file an FIR" Balkaur Singh posted on Facebook.

In return the AAP Punjab unit posted on X, "The BJP ruled Central Govt has sought a report from Govt of Punjab regarding IVF treatment of Smt. Charan Singh (Late Sidhu Moosewala's mother). CM Bhagwant Mann always respects the sentiments & dignity of Punjabis, it's the Central Govt that has asked for the documents. Urge the people to have a look at the facts and not to believe in any rumours" The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare order is based on the section 21 of ART (Regulations) act, 2021. Under Section 21 of the ART (Regulations) Act, 2021 General duties of assisted reproductive technology clinics and banks. —*ANI*

PROTEST ON

A woman throws a bag of trash at police blocking an anti-government demonstration against food scarcity at soup kitchens and economic reforms proposed by President Javier Milei in Buenos Aires, in Argentina
PHOTO: PTI

Santiago Martin: The highest electoral bond donor

Santiago Martin who made a fortune by selling lottery tickets is in the spotlight after he was revealed to be the top donor to political parties's company in the Electoral Bonds scheme. His company Future Gaming and Hotel Services Pvt. Ltd, bought electoral bonds worth 13.68billion rupees between April 2019 and January 2024 under the scheme which allowed political donors to remain anonymous - until Supreme Court recently scrapped the scheme and ordered their names to be published.

While donations under this scheme were not illegal, electoral bonds have been accused of making political funding more opaque. The ruling BJP which introduced the scheme was the biggest beneficiary, securing almost half of the bonds donated between 2018 and 2024.

Since then, it has emerged that of the bonds bought by Martin's company, more than 5 billion rupees went to the regional Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party which governs Tamil Nadu where Martin started his business. It's not clear yet who the remaining recipients are.

But Martin, 63, is also seen as a controversial figure - he has been dogged by political scandals and has been accused by authorities of being involved in financial irregularities including lottery fraud.

Reports say Martin was born in 1961 in the Andaman islands off India's east coast. As a teenager, he is believed to have worked as a daily-wage labourer in present-day Myanmar. In the 1980s, he returned to India and began working in a tea shop in Tamil Nadu.

He was struck by the popularity of lottery tickets among all sections of Tamil Nadu's population, but especially the poor. It prompted him to start the business which would make him a millionaire.

Martin opened his first shop in Coimbatore city and within a few years, overtook two competitors to become the biggest seller of lottery tickets in Tamil Nadu.

Santiago Martin's company Future Gaming and Hotel Services Pvt. Ltd, bought electoral bonds worth 13.68 billion rupees between April 2019 and January 2024 ***PHOTO: MARTIN CHARITABLE TRUST***

Martin scaled up the sales of what were known as "two-digit" lottery tickets - scratch cards which revealed two digits that the buyer could instantly check against winning numbers revealed through a live telecast facilitated by his company.

The draw of instant money led to higher sales - and, critics say, drove many into ruin.

Martin's lottery tickets soon found a market in neighbouring Karnataka and Kerala states, and he later expanded the business to northern and north-eastern India.

In a 2001 interview to rediff.com, he said that he sold 12 million lottery tickets every day. By then, his company had agreements with several state governments for distributing lottery tickets.

The article claimed that he paid massive sums every day - 350,000 rupees in sales tax to the Tamil Nadu government and 759,000 rupees in advance to the government of the north-eastern state of Sikkim - underscoring the thundering success of his business.

In 2003, Tamil Nadu's then chief minister, J Jayalalithaa, banned the sale of lottery tickets, acting on reports of people being financially ruined due to lotteries. This was a huge blow to Martin.

In 2011, again when Jayalalithaa was in power, he was arrested and spent some months in jail in a case related to land-grabbing before getting bail.

Martin's company also faces cases of lottery fraud in states including Kerala. In 2023, India's financial crimes unit said it seized assets and bank deposits worth 4.5bn rupees after searching properties belonging to him and his associates in a case related to lottery fraud in Sikkim state.

Mr Martin's appeal against the order was dismissed by a court the same year.

He has not been convicted in any of the cases against him yet.

Martin has not spoken to the media about the allegations, but his company's website states that Future Gaming "is known for its compliance towards rules and regulations" wherever it conducts business.

The electoral bonds data has now led the DMK's rivals and political observers in Tamil Nadu to question why the party received donations from Mr Martin when lotteries are banned in the state.

A DMK spokesperson did not respond to the BBC's messages, but the party has said its government has made no concessions for Mr Martin's company.

His family members also have ties to different political parties - his son-in-law is a member of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (Liberation Panthers Party), which is part of a Congress-led opposition alliance against the BJP, while his wife Leema has joined the Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi (Indian Democratic Party), which is an ally of BJP.

—BBC News

SALAR ساہر

Solar waste could reach 600 kilotonnes by 2030

India's solar waste could reach a staggering 600 kilotonnes by 2030 equivalent to filling up 720 Olympic-size swimming pools according to a new study released on Wednesday.

The study by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and independent think tank Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) said around 67 per cent of this waste will come from five states: Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

India's current installed 66.7 GW capacity (as of FY23) has already generated about 100 kilotonnes of waste, which will increase to 340 kilotonnes by 2030. This will include about 10 kilotonnes of silicon, 12-18 tonnes of silver, and 16 tonnes of cadmium and tellurium the majority of which are critical minerals for India, the study titled "Enabling a Circular Economy in India's Solar Industry: Assessing the Solar Waste Quantum" said.

Recycling solar waste to recover these materials will reduce import dependency and enhance India's mineral security.

The study found that the rest of the 260 kilotonnes of waste will come from new capacity that will be deployed in this decade (from 2024 to 2030).

The solar waste will increase to about 19,000 kilotonnes by 2050; 77 per cent of which will arise from new capacities, CEEW said, adding this is an opportunity for India to emerge as a leading hub of circular economy for the solar industry and ensure resilient solar supply chains.

Solar waste will increase to about 19,000 kilotonnes by 2050, 77 per cent of which will arise from new capacities ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

India plans to amass around 292 gigawatt of solar capacity by 2030, making solar PV waste management crucial for environmental, economic, and social reasons.

The study, conducted under Niti Aayog's Action Plan for Circular Economy - Solar Panels, for the first time, estimates India-specific solar waste generation from various streams, excluding manufacturing.

This information is crucial for creating data-driven waste management policies. India is already implementing several measures to tackle the waste. Last year, the environment ministry issued amended E-waste Management Rules 2022 bringing solar photovoltaic cells, panels, and modules under its ambit.

These rules mandate the producers of solar cells and modules to manage their waste under the extended producer responsibility (EPR) framework.

Arunabha Ghosh, CEO, CEEW, said, "India must proactively address solar waste, not just as an environmental imperative but as a strategic necessity for ensuring energy security and building a circular economy. As we witness the remarkable growth of solar from only 4 GW in March 2015 to 73 GW in December 2023, robust recycling mechanisms become increasingly crucial. They safeguard renewable ecosystems, create green jobs, enhance mineral security, foster innovation, and build resilient, circular supply chains."

Neeraj Kuldeep, Senior Programme Lead, CEEW, said, "India's G20 Presidency identified a circular economy as a thrust area for sustainable development. A circular solar industry and responsible waste management will maximise resource efficiency and make domestic supply chains resilient. The study provides robust evidence of the opportunity in solar waste management. However, solar recycling technologies and the industry are still at a nascent stage and require policy push and support."

—PTI

The study found that the rest of the 260 kilotonnes of waste will come from new capacity that will be deployed in this decade ***PHOTO: LAURENT JULLIAND/ BBC NEWS***

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

llegal profits from forced labour up by 37% in last 10 years: UN

Illegal profits from forced labour worldwide have risen to the "obscene" amount of USD 236 billion per year, UN labour agency reported. With sexual exploitation to blame for three-fourths of the take from a business that deprives migrants of money they can send home, swipes jobs from legal workers, and allows the criminals behind it to dodge taxes.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) said the tally for 2021, the most recent year covered in the painstaking international study, marked an increase of 37 per cent, or USD 64 billion, compared with its last estimate published a decade ago. That's a result of both more people being exploited and more cash generated from each victim, ILO said.

"USD 236 billion. This is the obscene level of annual profit generated from forced labour in the world today," the first line of the report's introduction said. That figure represents earnings "effectively stolen from the pockets of workers" by those who coerce them to work, as well as money taken from remittances of migrants and lost tax revenue for governments.

ILO officials noted that such a sum equaled the economic output of EU member Croatia and eclipsed the annual revenues of tech giants like Microsoft and Samsung.

Forced labour can encourage corruption, strengthen criminal networks and incentivize further exploitation, ILO said.

Its director-general, Gilbert Houngbo, wants international cooperation to fight the racket.

"People in forced labour are subject to multiple forms of coercion, the deliberate and systematic withholding of wages being amongst the most common," he said in a statement. "Forced labour perpetuates cycles of poverty and exploitation and strikes at the heart of human dignity.""We now know that the situation has only got worse," Houngbo added. ILO defines forced labour as work that's imposed against the will of the employee and exacted under penalty or the threat of one. It can happen at any phase of employment: during recruitment, in living conditions associated with work or by forcing people to stay in a job when they want to leave it.

On any given day in 2021, an estimated 27.6 million people were in forced labour a 10 per cent rise from five years earlier, ILO said. The Asia-Pacific region was home to more than half of those, while Africa, the Americas, and Europe-Central Asia each represented about 13 per cent to 14 per cent.

The International Labour Organisation said the tally for 2021, the most recent year covered in the international study, marked an increase of 37 per cent ***PHOTO: I NTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION***

Some 85 per cent of the people affected were working in "privately imposed forced labour," which can include slavery, serfdom, bonded labour, and activities like forms of begging where cash taken in goes to the benefit of someone else, ILO said. The rest were in forced labour imposed by government authorities a practice not covered in the study.Some critics have railed against "modern day slavery" in places like the prison system in the US state of Alabama.ILO experts said that government-imposed forced labour was excluded from the report because of a shortage of data about it even if estimates show nearly 4 million people were affected by it.

"The ILO certainly decries instances of state imposed forced labour wherever they occur, and whether that's in prison systems or the abuse of military conscription or other forms or manifestations of state and post forced labour," said Scott Lyon, an ILO senior policy officer.

While the report said just over one-fourth of the victims worldwide were subject to sexual exploitation, it accounted for nearly USD 173 billion in profits, or nearly three-quarters of the global total a sign of the higher margins generated from selling sex.

Some 6.3 million people faced situations of forced commercial sexual exploitation on any given day three years ago and nearly four in five of those victims were girls or women, ILO said. Children accounted for more than a quarter of the total cases.

Forced labour in industry trailed in a distant second, at USD 35 billion, followed by services at nearly USD 21 billion, agriculture at USD 5 billion and domestic work at USD 2.6 billion, the Geneva-based labour agency said.

Manuela Tomei, ILO's assistant Director-General for governance, said that "no region is immune" to the practice of forced labour and all economic sectors are involved.While countries including the United States were cited at the conference for efforts to fight forced labor, Tomei said the world was "far away" from UN goals to eradicate forced labour by 2030. "Forced labour is the opposite of social justice," he said. "Let me be very clear. Business must never be done at the expense of workers, dignity and labour rights."

—PTI

Bus crashes into tunnel in China, killing 14 people

BEIJING, 20 MARCH

A bus crashed into a tunnel wall on an expressway in northern China killing 14 people, state media said on Wednesday. At least 37 other people were injured in the Tuesday afternoon crash, state broadcaster CCTV said. The bus was carrying 51 passengers when it hit the wall on the Hohhot-Beihai Expressway in the city of Linfen in Shanxi province. There was no word on the cause of the accident, which CCTV said trapped passengers in the bus. In another crash in China last week, one person died and 37 were injured when a long-distance bus rear-ended a local bus that had stopped on the roadside, the official Xinhua News Agency said. The collision on Friday in the city of Tianjin engulfed both buses in flames, video posted by a television station showed. *—AP*

8 terrorists killed in firing at Port Authority in Pak

KARACHI, 20 MARCH

Heavily-armed Baloch militants on Wednesday forcibly entered Gwadar Port Authority Complex and opened fire while multiple explosions were also reported in the area in Pakistan's troubled Balochistan province. Security forces foiled the attack on the Gwadar Port Authority complex and killed the eight attackers. The attackers were neutralised while trying to gain entry into the port complex. Majeed Brigade of the proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility for the attack. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects. *—PTI*

Senegal President rejects blame for election chaos

DAKAR, 20 MARCH

Senegal's president has told BBC he does not regret delaying this year's elections, a move that sparked deadly protests. Macky Sall said he did not make the decision alone - he was responding to concerns raised by parliamentarians. After a violent backlash, many feared the relatively stable nation was slipping into political crisis. But the attempt to push the election back by 10 months was blocked by Senegal's top court. The vote will now take place on Sunday - a month after it was initially due. "I have no apology to make, I have done nothing wrong," President Sall told BBC. "All the actions that have been taken have been within the framework of the law and regulations." With just three weeks to go before the 25 February election, Sall announced that it would be delayed, a move that was later approved by parliament. *—BBC News*

Vietnamese Prez resigns after just over a year

BEIJING, 20 MARCH

A HANOI, 20 MARCH

Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong resigned after a little over a year in the position, state media VN Express reported. His resignation takes place amid an intense anti-corruption campaign that has hit the highest echelons of the Communist Party. Thuong, 54, became president in March 2023, two months after his predecessor Nguyen Xuan Phuc resigned to take "political responsibility" for corruption scandals during the pandemic. He was the youngest president since modern day Vietnam emerged from war in the mid-1970s. The position of president in Vietnam is largely ceremonial and ranks third in the country's political hierarchy. *—AP*

Israel working on nat'l food security plan for first time

Ministry said they are willing to promote local food industries

TEL AVIV, 20 MARCH

The ministry's proposal suggests that a national plan on food security be formulated and submitted for government approval within 180 days *PHOTO: PTI*

For the first time in its history, Israel is working to ensure food security in the country. As such, Israel's Ministry of Agriculture said that it is "changing its face and focusing its mission" in a new way and, in cooperation with other ministries, is developing a proposal for a national plan to that end.

To emphasise the importance of this, the ministry intends to change its name to "Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security." The ministry said that in the coming days it will submit a decision-making proposal for the government's approval to formulate a national plan for food security that will include the formulation of goals for the supply of food to the entire population until the year 2050, with intermediate goals for the years 2030 and 2040. The ministry's proposal suggests that a national plan on food security be formulated and submitted for government approval within 180 days, led by the Ministry of Agriculture and in cooperation with the relevant government ministries, where the goal is to ensure local food production capacity and a regular food supply of healthy and affordable food for the medium and long term, in quantity, quality, diversity and physical and economic accessibility that will enable a healthy lifestyle for the entire population in Israel., while promoting agriculture, local food industries and sustainable and climate-adapted food systems.

For the purpose of formulating the plan, an inter-ministerial work team will be established, headed by the Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture, with the participation of representatives of the relevant government ministries, including: the National Security Headquarters, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy and Industry, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and many more. *—ANI*

Despite war, Israel ranks 5th in world happiness report

Tel Aviv, 20 March

Despite five months of war with Hamas, Israel ranked fifth in the 2024 World Happiness Report, which was released on Wednesday. The annual report ranked the happiness of 143 countries based on life evaluation, positive emotions, and negative emotions, among other factors. Anat Panti, a happiness policy researcher at Bar-Ilan University University in Ramat Gan, explained, "Even this year, which was one of the most difficult in the country's history, Israel is ranked in the top five of the international happiness index. *—ANI*

Among the 15 People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft, six entered the southwest corner of Taiwan's air defense identification zone according to authority *PHOTO: X/ TAIWAN MINISTRY*

Taiwan tracks 15 Chinese military aircraft around nation

TAIPEI, 20 MARCH

- The Taiwan Ministry of National Defense has reportedly tracked 15 Chinese military aircraft and 10 naval vessels across Taiwan, between 6 am on Tuesday (19 March) and 6 am on Wednesday (20 March), Taiwan News reported

The Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) has reportedly tracked 15 Chinese military aircraft and 10 naval vessels across Taiwan, between 6 am on Tuesday (19 March) and 6 am on Wednesday (20 March), Taiwan News reported.

Among the 15 People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft, six entered the southwest corner of Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ), according to the MND.

However, no PLA aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait median line at that time, as reported by Taiwan News.

Responding to that, Taiwan sent aircraft and naval ships and deployed air defence missile systems to monitor the PLA activity.

Reportedly, this month, Taiwan has tracked Chinese military aircraft 209 times and naval vessels 133 times.

Since September 2020, China has increased its use of gray zone tactics by gradually increasing the number of military aircraft and naval ships operating around Taiwan, according to Taiwan News.

Gray zone tactics are defined as "an effort or series of efforts beyond steady-state deterrence and assurance that attempts to achieve one's security objectives without resorting to direct and sizable use of force."

Earlier, Taiwan's MND reported the tracking of ten Chinese naval vessels and nine military aircraft in the vicinity of Taiwan between 6 am on Monday and 6 am on Tuesday.

Among the nine People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft, one Chinese drone breached Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the southwest, while a PLA helicopter was monitored in the southeast sector of the ADIZ. *—ANI*

IMRAN KHAN APPROACHES SUPREME COURT

ISLAMABAD, 20 MARCH

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Wednesday approached the Supreme Court to form a judicial commission comprising serving judges to probe the authenticity of last month's elections marred by allegations of rigging.

The general elections were held on 8 February but Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf refused to accept the outcome by alleging that the results were manipulated. Senior lawyer Hamid Khan, who is also a leader of PTI, filed the petition on behalf of Khan, stating the commission should investigate, audit and review matters related to the procedure and conduct of the general elections held on 8 February, as well as its results and the investigation should be complete and made public.

"It is further prayed that all the consequential acts of forming the government at the federal and Punjab levels be immediately suspended till the result of the probe by the Judicial Commission appointed on this behalf is made public," the petition stated.

Khan's party claims that it had won about 180 seats of the National Assembly but the results were rigged and it was deprived of dozens of them and won only 92 out of 266 contested seats. *—PTI*

Imran Khan *PHOTO: PTI*

740K ROHINGYAS RESETTLED

Local fishermen from Kuala Bubon rescued six of the refugees and evacuated them to a temporary shelter *PHOTO: AP*

Boat carrying migrants capsizes off Indonesia

BANDA ACEH, 20 MARCH

A wooden boat carrying dozens of Rohingya Muslims capsized about 16 miles from the coastline of Kuala Bubon beach in Indonesia's northernmost province of Aceh on Wednesday.

Local fishermen from Kuala Bubon rescued six of the refugees and evacuated them to a temporary shelter. There were no immediate reports of casualties. About 7,40,000 Rohingya were resettled in Bangladesh to escape the brutal counterinsurgency campaign by security forces in their homeland of Myanmar.

Thousands have been trying to flee overcrowded camps in Bangladesh to neighboring countries with Indonesia seeing a spike in refugee numbers since November, prompting it to call on the international community for help. Rohingya arriving in Aceh face some hostility from some fellow Muslims.

Last year, nearly 4,500 Rohingya two-thirds of them women and children fled their homeland of Myanmar and the refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh by boat, the United Nations refugee agency reported. Of those, 569 died or went missing while crossing the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, the highest death toll since 2014.

Returning safely to Myanmar is virtually impossible because the military that attacked them overthrew Myanmar's democratically elected government in 2021. So far, no country is offering them any large-scale resettlement opportunities. *—AP*

8 dead after tanker capsizes off Japan

TOKYO, 20 MARCH

Seven people have been pronounced dead after a South Korean ship capsized off an island in southwestern Japan, the coast guard said on Wednesday afternoon, out of nine crew members found so far.

Authorities said that one member of the crew was alive, and described another's condition as unknown. Earlier, authorities said all nine were in "unknown condition".

The coast guard is still searching for two more people who were on the chemical tanker, which flipped over after reporting trouble in a rough sea.

The coast guard said it received a distress call from the chemical tanker Keoyoung Sun, saying that it was tilting while seeking refuge from the weather near Japan's Mutsure Island. The island is just off the southwestern end of Japan's main island of Honshu, about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from Tokyo.

The ship was completely capsized by the time rescuers arrived at the scene, the coast guard said.

Footage on NHK television showed the ship completely upside down, a rough sea washing over its red underside. The ship was carrying a South Korean captain, and its crew included another South Korean national, a Chinese national and eight Indonesians, according to the coast guard. *—AP*

HYDERABAD STUDENT GOES 'MISSING' IN US, FAMILY RECEIVES 'RANSOM' CALL

HYDERABAD, 20 MARCH

A student, 25, from Hyderabad, studying in the US, has gone missing there since 7 March and his family here said they received a "ransom" call.

Mohammed Abdul, a resident of Nacharam here, went to the US in May 2023 to pursue a Masters in IT from Cleveland University, and was staying in Cleveland, his family said. Mohammed Saleem, Abdul's father, said his son last spoke to him on 7 March, and since then he was not in touch with his family and his mobile phone was switched off. Abdul's roommates in the US informed him that they have lodged a missing complaint with Cleveland Police. However, on 19 March, Abdul's family received a call from an unidentified person, who claimed that Abdul had been kidnapped allegedly by a gang selling drugs and demanded USD 1,200 to "release" him. *—PTI*

Mohammed Abdul *PHOTO: X*

11 months into war, famine looms in Sudan

KABUL, 20 MARCH

Civilians caught up in Sudan's civil war have given graphic accounts to the BBC of rape, ethnic violence and street executions. Our journalists have managed to make it to the front line of the fighting close to the capital, Khartoum.

Top UN officials have said the conflict has plunged the country into "one of the worst humanitarian nightmares in recent history" and could trigger the world's largest hunger crisis.

There are also fears that in Darfur, in the west of the country, a repeat of what the US called genocide 20 years ago may be beginning to unfold. As if out of nowhere, a huge blast shakes the road in Omdurman. People scream and run in all directions, shouting: "Go back, go back, there'll be another one." Thick smoke blankets everything. Moments earlier, the battered street had been dotted with pedestrians picking up rice, bread and vegetables from the shops, which had only recently begun to re-open. In mid-February, the Sudanese army retook the city - one of three along the River Nile that form Sudan's wider capital, Khartoum.

Civilians have now started to return, but mortars, like the one that landed in the middle of this main street, still fall daily. For international media, gaining access to cover the civil war that erupted last April has been difficult - but BBC has managed to get to the front line. *—BBC News*

TALIBAN ORDER

Afghanistan schools starts without 1M girls

ISLAMABAD, 20 MARCH

The school year in Afghanistan started Wednesday but without girls whom the Taliban barred from attending classes beyond the sixth grade, making it the only country with restrictions on female education.

The UN children's agency says more than 1 million girls are affected by the ban. It also estimates 5 million were out of school before the Taliban takeover due to a lack of facilities and other reasons. The Taliban's education ministry marked the start of the new academic year with a ceremony that female journalists were not allowed to attend. The invitations sent out to reporters said: "Due to the lack of a suitable place for the sisters, we apologise to female reporters."

More than 1 million girls are affected by the ban *PHOTO: AP*

During a ceremony, the Taliban's education minister, Habibullah Agha, said that the ministry is trying "to increase the quality of education of religious and modern sciences as much as possible." The Taliban have been prioritising Islamic knowledge over basic literacy and numeracy with their shift toward madrassas, or religious schools.

The minister also called on students to avoid wearing clothes that contradict Islamic and Afghan principles. Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Taliban's deputy prime minister, said they were trying to expand education in "all remote areas in the country." The Taliban previously said girls continuing their education went against their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, and that certain conditions were needed for their return to school. However, they made no progress in creating said conditions. When they ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s, they also banned girls' education. *—AP*

Rupee falls 13 paise to close at 83.16 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

The rupee declined 13 paise to close at 83.16 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, weighed down by a strong American currency against major rivals overseas and elevated crude oil prices. However, a recovery in domestic equity markets and foreign fund inflows cushioned the downside, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83 and touched the intraday low of 83.17 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.16 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 13 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 13 paise to 83.03 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.28 per cent higher at 104.11. *—PTI*

Gold jumps to ₹ 66,320 per 10 grams

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Gold price jumped Rs 70 to Rs 66,320 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 66,250 per 10 grams. Silver also advanced Rs 150 to Rs 76,650 per kg. In the previous close, it had finished at Rs 76,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 66,320 per 10 grams, up Rs 70 from the previous close. "In the domestic markets, the weaker rupee pushed the gold prices higher but the demand remained lacklustre," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,154 per ounce, down USD 5 against the previous close. Spot gold edged lower to USD 2,154.24 an ounce as the Dollar Index was up along with the US Treasury yield. Also, silver was down at USD 24.84 per ounce. In the previous trade, it had settled at USD 24.91 per ounce. *—PTI*

Fusion CX inaugurates new facility in TN

CHENNAI, 20 MARCH

Business process management company Fusion CX has inaugurated its new facility here bolstering its growth plans besides generating employment opportunities in the region, the company said on Wednesday. The facility, spread across 12,000 sq ft in Ambattur, here would be able to accommodate 650 employees in two shifts. It also marks the company's foray into the South Indian market. As part of the expansion programme, Focus CX said it has recruited 150 employees and plans to add another 500 taking the overall employee base of the company in the country beyond the 10,000 mark by June.*—PTI*

Bharti Hexacom gets SEBI's nod for IPO

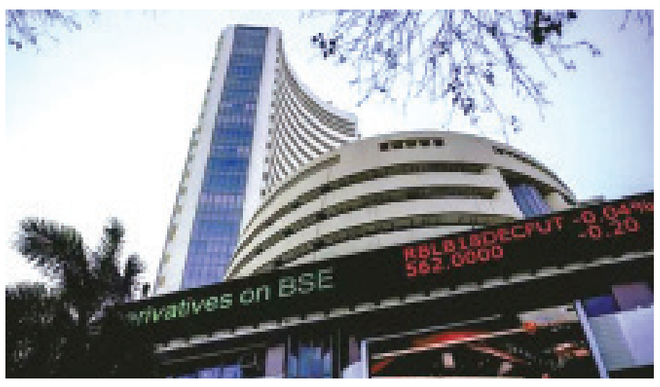
NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Bharti Airtel's arm Bharti Hexacom has received capital markets regulator SEBI's nod to mobilise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The IPO will not have any fresh issuance of equity shares, and since it is an offer for sale or OFS, Bharti Hexacom will not receive any proceeds from the issue. Under the OFS, 10 crore equity shares will be offloaded by Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. The offer represents 20 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of Bharti Hexacom. Bharti Hexacom, which filed draft papers with the markets regulator in January, obtained its observation letter on 11 March, an update with SEBI showed on Tuesday. Bharti Airtel holds 70 per cent of the equity share capital of the company and the government through Telecommunications Consultants India holds 30 per cent. *—PTI*

Sensex, Nifty rebound as Reliance, ITC shares rally

Nifty climbs 21.65 points or 0.10 per cent

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH



Maruti, Nestle, Power Grid, State Bank of India, ITC, Reliance Industries, Kotak Mahindra Bank, were the major gainers *PHOTO: PTI*

- The 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 89.64 points or 0.12 per cent to settle at 72,101.69. During the day, it jumped 390.62 points or 0.54 per cent to 72,402.67

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Wednesday, propelled by bargain hunting in index majors Reliance Industries, ITC and SBI amid a largely firm trend in global equities.

In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 89.64 points or 0.12 per cent to settle at 72,101.69. During the day, it jumped 390.62 points or 0.54 per cent to 72,402.67. The benchmark hit its day's low of 71,674.42, down 337.63 points or 0.46 per cent, earlier in the day.

The NSE Nifty climbed 21.65 points or 0.10 per cent to finish at 21,839.10.

"Lifted by favourable global sentiment and solid direct tax collection, Indian markets rebounded, closing with modest gains. Robust FII and DII inflows sustained the market," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

From the Sensex basket, Maruti, Nestle, Power Grid, State Bank of India, ITC, Reliance Industries, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank and Asian Paints were the major gainers.

In contrast, Tata Steel, Axis Bank, Tata Motors and HDFC Bank were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled in positive territory.

Japanese stock exchanges were closed for a holiday.

European markets were trading mostly lower.

Wall Street ended with gains in the overnight trade on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,421.48 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The net direct tax collection grew 19.88 per cent to over Rs 18.90 lakh crore till March 17 on higher advance tax mop-up.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.80 per cent to USD 86.68 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 736.37 points or 1.01 per cent to settle at 72,012.05 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty slumped 238.25 points or 1.08 per cent to finish at 21,817.45.

—PTI

HC dismisses plea against Truecaller with ₹10K costs

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The petitioner alleged that Truecaller shared data of third parties without consent *PHOTO: X*

Delhi High Court on Wednesday dismissed with a costs of Rs 10,000 a plea to reconsider its decision refusing to entertain a public interest legislation alleging violation of people's right to privacy by Truecaller, a global caller ID platform.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora said no grounds were made out for review of its 12 February order.

The bench said the costs of Rs 10,000 shall be paid to the Central government.

Petitioner Ajay Shukla sought review of the court's order by which his petition was dismissed.

The petitioner's counsel said the order was passed only on the basis of oral submissions made on behalf of the respondent authorities.

The Centre's counsel opposed the review plea, saying this was an abuse of process of law and this type of misadventure needs to be dealt with strictly.

The counsel further contended that the petition be dismissed with heavy costs as the whole government machinery comes into motion whenever such petitions are filed.

The petitioner's counsel had argued that the "cause of action" in the two petitions was different and the plea was not filed for publicity.

The petitioner alleged that Truecaller shared data of third parties without consent, that is, mobile number and e-mail ID of contacts from the phonebook of the person using the mobile app.

The petitioner also claimed Truecaller causes "reputational loss and commercial loss" as it gives an option to mark contact numbers as "spam". PTI

—PTI

URGE INTERVENTION

Small tea growers voice concern over 'poor' quality tea

KOLKATA, 20 MARCH

CISTA said that the commerce ministry has enhanced the budget for a generic campaign of tea which is the need of the hour *PHOTO: PTI*

Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Associations (CISTA), a body of small tea growers, has voiced concern over the alleged poor quality of teas flooding the market and urged the intervention of the Tea Board in this regard.

In a letter written to Tea Board chairman A S Bhatia, CISTA president Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty said that a generic campaign focussed on the health benefits of drinking tea should be carried out to promote consumption among the young people who are more enticed to partake soft drinks and coffee.

"We have observed that bad quality teas are flooded in the domestic market and these were being sold at a very low price. Poor quality tea manufacturing and packaging should be stopped immediately", the association said in the letter.

CISTA said that the commerce ministry has enhanced the budget for a generic campaign of tea which is the need of the hour.

"Young people in the age group of 18 years to 22 years are far away from tea drinking and have more affinity for soft drinks and coffee. A focussed generic campaign highlighting the health benefits of tea drinking is needed to increase per capita domestic consumption of the beverage", the letter said.

The association, in another letter to the Tea Board chairman, said that as the price of green leaf was almost stagnant for the last seven years and cost of production rising, there is a need for a minimum support price or fair price of the same. Small tea growers contribute to more than 50 per cent of total production in the country. *—PTI*

Assam's semiconductor unit to be a gamechanger

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Manufacturing of semiconductors in Assam will put the state on the global map, said industrialist and philanthropist Ratan Tata, whose conglomerate has put in Rs 27,00 0 crore in investments for a semiconductor plant in Jagiroad.

"The investments being made in Assam transform the state in complex treatment for cancer care. Today, the state government of Assam in partnership with the Tata group will make Assam a major player in sophisticated semiconductors," Ratan Tata posted on his X timeline, attaching pictures of him, Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran.

Tatas, in collaboration with the Assam government, has already set up several cancer care hospitals across the state.

"This new development will put Assam on the global map. We wish to thank the Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma for his support and vision that has made all this possible," Ratan Tata's X post added.

Earlier on Tuesday, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw assured that the first semi-conductor chip would be rolled out

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was present during the foundation stone ceremony, said that industries in India had never considered the northeast region for businesses during previous industrial revolutions.

—ANI

$272 MILLION

French antitrust agency had issued temporary orders to Google in April 2020 to hold talks within three months with news publishers *PHOTO: X*

France fine Google over dispute with news publishers

PARIS, 20 MARCH

- The dispute is part of a larger effort by authorities in the European Union and around the world to force Google and other tech companies to compensate news publishers for content

France's competition watchdog hit Google on Wednesday with another big fine tied to a long-running dispute over payments to French publishers for their news.

The French Competition Authority said it issued the 250 million euro ($272 million) penalty because of Google's failure to comply with some commitments it made in a negotiating framework.

The dispute is part of a larger effort by authorities in the European Union and around the world to force Google and other tech companies to compensate news publishers for content.

The US tech giant was forced to negotiate with French publishers after a court in 2020 upheld an order saying payments were required by a 2019 European Union copyright directive.

Google said in a blog post that it agreed to settle the fine, which was imposed over how it conducted the negotiations, "because it's time to move on." It said the fine was "not proportionate" to the issues raised by the French watchdog and "doesn't sufficiently take into account" Google's efforts to answer and resolve the concerns. France was the first of the EU's 27 nations to adopt the copyright directive, which lays out a way for publishers and news companies to strike licensing deals with online platforms.

Wednesday's decision by the French Competition Authority is the fourth in as many years against Google for failing to comply with the EU legal framework that aims to establish "necessary conditions for balanced negotiations between press agencies, publishers and digital platforms".

The French antitrust agency had issued temporary orders to Google in April 2020 to hold talks within three months with news publishers. In 2021, the agency fined Google 500 million euros ($592 million) for failing to negotiate a fair payment for publishers' news.

—PTI

PHOTO: X

DIRECT SALES IN INDIA GREW 12% IN 2022-23: SURVEY

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

The direct selling industry in India has registered growth of more than 12 per cent, on a yearly basis, with the gross industry turnover at Rs 21,282 crore in 2022-23, according to an annual survey report released by the Indian Direct Selling Association (IDSA) on Wednesday.

By definition, direct sales are sales that occur between a brand and the end-user without a middleman or distributor. The survey, compiled by market research company KANTAR, reflected the overall improved performance of the industry in all the segments it deals with vis-a-vis the year 2021-22 which was partially marred by the pandemic.The Northern region continued to take the lead with 30 per cent of turnover, followed by the East with 25 per cent, West 22 per cent, South 15 per cent, and North East 9 per cent.Among states, Maharashtra led with 12 per cent turnover, followed by West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh with 10 per cent each

Wellness and nutraceutical products remained the preferred segment, accounting for 73.5 per cent and cosmetics and personal care 11.3 per cent of the gross turnover. *—ANI*

JSW MG Motor India to invest ₹5,000cr to set up second plant at Halol

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

JSW MG Motor India will invest Rs 5,000 crore to enhance production capacity and launch one new car every 3-6 months starting September, top company officials said on Wednesday.The newly formed company, a joint venture between China's SAIC and Indian conglomerate JSW Group will also seek to create a "Maruti moment" in the new energy vehicle segment, JSW Group Chairman Sajjan Jindal said here, while announcing the finalisation of the partnership here.The joint venture aims to sell one million units of passenger electric vehicles in India by 2030 when the total market is expected to be 10 million units annually."We have announced today that we are going to have our second plant in Gujarat near our existing unit at Halol itself," MG Motor India Chairman Emeritus Rajeev Chaba said. The company's production capacity will go from over 1 lakh per year to over 3 lakh a year, he said.

— PTI

SEBI proposes audiovisual details of IPO

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Financial market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed that companies desirous of raising capital through public issues may be required to file disclosures made in the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) in an audio-visual format.

The disclosures are made for investors so that they can make informed decisions while investing in the company's public issue.

DRHP is a document that consists of the company's financial details, future prospects, and other key aspects regarding the business and is being filed to the regulator to raise money essentially via public offerings of its shares.

In its draft put up on its website on Tuesday, the regulator proposed that the audio visual on the public issues will be in bilingual version -- English and Hindi and made available in the public domain.

SEBI said it is expected that the audiovisual will provide ease in understanding the salient features and also provide reference to various disclosures of the proposed public issue. *—ANI*

HITS HIGH

₹18.2L crore UPI transactions in Feb

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

UPI shares in digital payments reached close to 80 per cent in 2023 *PHOTO:X*

Payments through digital means in India are hitting fresh highs, as its citizens are increasingly adopting the emerging modes of transacting on the internet.

In February, transactions worth Rs 18.2 lakh crore were made through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with a staggering 122 crore number of transactions.

The transactions made last month through the popular instant payment mechanism were a tad lower than in January, where the total value of transactions was Rs 18.4 lakh crore. The total number of transactions recorded in the month of January was 121 crore. Data maintained by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) showed that an average of Rs 40,000-Rs 80,000 crore worth of UPI transactions are made in India on a daily basis.

Coming to NEFT and RTGS, the two other instruments for online payments, the average transactions made through these were an average of Rs 33.85 lakh crore and Rs 146 lakh crore, respectively, data showed. Coming to internet banking and mobile banking, transactions worth Rs 91.24 lakh crore and Rs 28.16 lakh crore, respectively, were made in January 2024.

The share of UPI in digital payments in India has reached close to 80 per cent in 2023, informed Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das earlier this month, as he outlined the growth of the payments ecosystem in the country.

Retail digital payments in India have grown from 162 crore transactions in the financial year 2012-13 to over 14,726 crore transactions in 2023-24 (till February 2024) -- approximately a 90-fold increase over 12 years. *—ANI*

KNOW YOUR TEAM

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU

RCB aims to win the title this year. Coach Andy Flower promises an aggressive approach. With the women's team WPL win, there's a chance for IPL-WPL double

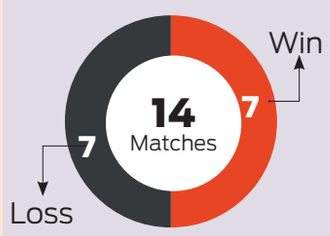
VIRAT KOHLI
Key Batsman

53.25 Avg (Average)
101 HS (Highest Score)
14 Innings (Innings)
139.82 SR (Strike Rate)
639 (Total runs)
16 6s (sixes)

STRENGTHS

RCB has a an explosive batting lineup with du Plessis, Kohli, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green. It has well balanced team of experienced and young players

2023 IPL RECORDS



WEAKNESS

RCB's bowling is weak. The team acquired Alzarri Joseph and Yash Dayal who have not performed well in previous seasons.

FAF DU PLESSIS
Key Batsman

14 Innings (Innings)
153 SR (Strike Rate)
730 (Total runs)
56 Avg (Average)
36 6s (sixes)
84 HS (Highest Score)

SQUAD

Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan

SCHEDULE

22 Mar, vs CSK	25 Mar, vs PK	29 Mar, vs KKR	2 Apr, vs LSG
Chennai	Bengaluru	Bengaluru	Bengaluru

PHOTO: PTI

Moment of my life: Patil describes meeting idol Virat

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

She was the cynosure of all eyes on Sunday having played a massive role in RCB's WPL triumph but Tuesday night gave 'Purple Cap' winner Shreyanka Patil a chance to enjoy a rare 'Fan Girl' moment with none other than Virat Kohli.The 21-year-old off-spinner, who had been a revelation in both the eliminator and final with her match-winning performances at the death, couldn't stop gushing on social media when she realized that her childhood idol knew her name."Started watching cricket cos of him. Grew up dreaming of being like him. And last night, had the moment of my life," she wrote on 'X', posting her picture alongside Kohli from the RCB 'Unbox' event."Virat said, 'Hi Shreyanka, well bowled.' He knows my name," the surreal feeling was yet to sink and it was understandable from her post.Shreyanka was picked up by RCB during the inaugural WPL auctions last year at a base price of Rs 10 lakh and she finished with six wickets in seven matches, the most for her team. *—PTI*

Former Pak test captain Saeed passes away

KARACHI, 20 MARCH

Former Pakistan Test captain Saeed Ahmed passed away at the age of 86, on Wednesday.Saeed represented Pakistan in 41 Test matches, scoring 2,991 runs with the help of five centuries and 16 half-centuries. He also took 22 wickets with his right-arm off-spin bowling.He made his Test debut against West Indies in 1958 and played his last Test for Pakistan in Melbourne during the 1972-73 tour.He was Pakistan's sixth Test captain and had replaced Hanif Mohammad as skipper of the side during England's tour of the nation in 1969.However, his tenure as captain lasted for only three Tests.PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi expressed condolences and said, "The PCB is saddened over the demise of former Test captain and expresses deep condolences to the family of Ahmed.*—AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Miami Open: Halep beaten on return from doping ban

MIAMI GARDENS, 20 MARCH

Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep returned to professional tennis after getting her doping suspension reduced on appeal, playing her first match in about 1 1/2 years on Tuesday — a 1-6, 6-4, 6-3 loss to Paula Badosa at the Miami Open.Halep looked terrific in the first set, then encountered trouble later, including having a trainer massage her right shoulder during a changeover late in the second. She was broken at love in the final game, each point ending with an errant groundstroke: backhand wide, backhand into the net, backhand long, forehand wide.*—AP*

If Rahul performs well in IPL, reward will be T20 WC: Langer

Lucknow pace bowling unit looks thin on experience

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

If KL Rahul leads Lucknow Super Giants to their maiden IPL title, he will automatically be rewarded with a spot in the Indian team for the T20 World Cup, reckons head coach Justin Langer, who wants his team's national hopefuls to "concentrate" on doing well for the franchise first.

Rahul, who is coming back from a quadriceps injury and is not expected to keep wickets at the beginning of the IPL, is still not a certainty in the Indian T20 squad and only a good IPL with both the bat and gloves can seal the deal for him.

Asked how he would balance his skipper's ambition with the team's interests, Langer said it isn't all that complicated."If the team does well, everyone gets rewarded. If KL can captain LSG to the IPL title, that means he would have captained well, batted well, and kept wickets well," Langer replied to a PTI query during a season-opening media interaction on Wednesday.

KL Rahul PHOTO: PTI

Apart from Rahul, the other serious T20 World Cup contender from LSG is leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi."The message for players, like KL or Bishi (Bishnoi) will be that the more they concentrate on playing well for LSG, their chances (of WT20 call-up) will increase."

Rahul is expected to link up with the team on Wednesday evening due to a flight delay but the former Australian opener didn't say a word about when the star player will start keeping."He has followed all the 'Return To Play' protocols and he has been hitting a lot of balls."

Bowling thin on experience but talent amazing With foreign recruits Mark Wood and David Willey ruled out of the tournament, Lucknow Super Giants' pace bowling unit looks thin on experience.Shivam Mavi, the injury-prone pacer, hasn't played competitive cricket since August 2023 while Delhi's talented tearaway quick Mayank Yadav was out of the entire Ranji Trophy season with a side strain.

Justin Langer PHOTO: AFP

Mohsin Khan, the find of the 2022 IPL, has had injury issues and Yash Thakur isn't very experienced at the tournament level."It is a very good observation that we lack some experience in the pace department but there is an enormous talent. The pacers -- they all look fit, healthy, and hungry. *—PTI*

RED BULL DRAMA

Verstappen huge favourite in Melbourne

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Max Verstappen will be a heavy favorite to make it three wins from three this season as his Red Bull team attempts to put weeks of paddock intrigue behind them at the Australian Grand Prix.

The Dutch three-time world champion emphatically led home teammate Sergio Perez in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but the celebrations were overshadowed by team disunity and allegations against Christian Horner.

The long-serving Red Bull boss was cleared of inappropriate conduct involving a woman colleague ahead of the season-opener in Sakhir and tried to put a lid on the drama in Jeddah.

But the unnamed woman has appealed to Red Bull GmbH, the parent company of the all-conquering Formula One team.

Max Verstappen PHOTO: AFP

She has also reportedly lodged an official complaint to Formula One's governing body the FIA, ensuring the saga will rumble on in Melbourne this weekend.

Horner has guided Red Bull to six constructors' and seven drivers' world championships since 2005, including the last three won by Verstappen. *—AP*

Zara in shared lead at Queen Sirikit Cup

DUBAI, 20 MARCH

Indian teen star Zara Anand braved icy and frosty conditions on the opening morning of the 44th Queen Sirikit Cup golf tournament to card 1-over 73 and take a share of the lead in Christchurch, New Zealand on Wednesday.

The 15-year-old Zara, who was added to the team by the Indian Golf Union following the withdrawal of 2023 winner Avani Prashanth, shot at the Par-72 Clearwater Golf Club.

She shared the lead with Chinese Taipei's Chun-Wei Wu, the reigning Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific champion. *—AP*

Zara Anand PHOTO: AFP

WFI ensures Sports Code is followed in state unit polls

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Focussed on setting its house in order, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) will ensure that Sports Code is followed in the upcoming state association elections in Gujarat, Telangana, and Uttarakhand and is set to resume National Camp from 27 March.

Till recently, many state associations, like Rajasthan, had office bearers working even after crossing the specified age limit of 70.The WFI wanted to ensure that the age and tenure guidelines of the Sports Code were followed and consequently, Nanu Singh, 72, was not allowed to contest the elections.Similarly, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka held elections as per the Sports Code."We are ensuring that the right candidates come to state federations. We are not allowing any violation of rules set by the government.

Today, we have held elections in Chandigarh and soon Gujarat, Uttarakhand, and Telangana will also hold polls under the Sports Code," a WFI source told PTI.It may be mentioned that recently Rohtash Singh, who was President of the Haryana Association, was expelled by the General Council of the state body for misconduct, and senior Vice President Ramesh Kumar was made acting President."

Mr Singh had not presented accounts before the members for long and was acting arbitrarily.

The state body removed him. Soon the body will choose its new President," the source added.NATIONAL CAMPThe WFI will resume national camp on 27 March, after almost 16 months with Sonepat and Gandhinagar in Gujarat to be the likely venues for men and women respectively.

The WFI-organised national camps have been on hold since January 2023 when the country's three elite wrestlers accused then-WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexual harassment, a controversy that pegged back Indian wrestling. *—PTI*

INDIA EYE 3 POINTS IN FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIER AGAINST WEAKENED AFGHANISTAN

ABHA, 20 MARCH

Bolstered by the return of Jeakson Singh and Anwar Ali, the Indian football team will renew its quest for a maiden entry into the third round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers when it faces a weakened Afghanistan here on Thursday.With mid-field general Jeakson and center-back Anwar back in the line-up after long injury layoffs, because of which India suffered in the recent past, the Blue Tigers will fancy their chances against the lower-ranked opponents in the second-round preliminary joint qualification match. Nobody in this Indian squad can tell about Afghanistan better than the evergreen Sunil Chhetri, who is going strong at 39 and will be spearheading the visiting attack alongside Manvir Singh, who found the net in the team's win against Kuwait. With three points and one win from two matches, India currently occupies the second place in the Group A pecking order.Reigning Asian champions Qatar lead the standings with six points from two wins, while Kuwait is second with one win. Having lost both their games so far, Afghanistan are placed last. Match timing: 12.30 am IST (Friday). *—PTI*

Sunil Chhetri PHOTO: AFP

SRIKANTH, LAKSHYA PROGRESS TO SECOND ROUND

BASEL, 20 MARCH

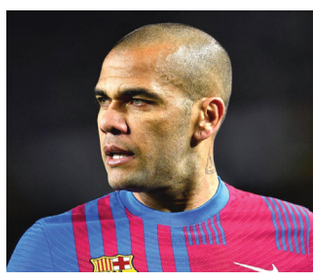
Former champion Kidambi Srikanth and in-form Lakshya Sen produced impressive performances to progress to the men's singles second round of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Wednesday. Srikanth, the former world no. 1, who had claimed the title in 2015, outwitted world no. 24 Chinese Taipei's Wang Tzu Wei 21-17 21-18 in a 43-minute contest. It was his sixth win in seven meetings against his opponent. Later Sen, who had reached back-to-back semifinals at French Open and All England Championships in the last two weeks. *—AP*

Ex-Brazil star Dani Alves freed on bail

LONDON, 20 MARCH

Former Brazil international footballer Dani Alves is to be released from jail pending an appeal against his rape conviction in exchange for posting bail of one million euros ($1.08 million), a Barcelona court said Wednesday.

The ruling came a day after his lawyer requested the 40-year-old's release on grounds he had already served a quarter of his four-and-a-half-year sentence in pre-trial detention following his arrest in January 2023. In its ruling, the court granted him "provisional release" in exchange for "the bail payment of 1,000,000 euros" also requiring he hand over his Spanish and Brazilian passports, remain in Spain, and present himself to court "every week".



Dani Alves PHOTO: AFP

Public prosecutors had opposed his request, arguing he posed a high-flight risk. *—AP*

BOXING'S OLYMPIC FUTURE

IOC tells national federations to create new governing body

LAUSANNE,20 MARCH

The IOC has reiterated its threat to leave boxing out of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics if national federations continue to align themselves with the suspended International Boxing Association (IBA), casting fresh doubts on the crisis-hit sport's future at the quadrennial showpiece.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had de-recognised the IBA in 2019 over long-standing financial, sports integrity, and governance issues. Boxing at the 2024 Paris Olympics is set to be overseen by the IOC.

It will be the second successive time, after the Tokyo Olympics, that the IBA will have no involvement in bouts at the mega-event.

Speaking at a press conference here on Tuesday following the IOC Executive Board meeting, IOC Sports Director Kit McConnell said boxing is still "on hold" for the 2028 Olympics.

"Following the decision by the IOC Session last year, the inclusion of boxing in the LA28 Olympic programme is on hold and not confirmed," McConnell said.

"If there is no boxing body supported and driven by the National Federations, we will not be in a position to include boxing in the Olympic programme," he added.

The IOC put the onus on the national federations to step away from the IBA, led by Russian Umar Kremlev, and create a new world governing body to secure boxing's future in the sport. Boxing has been a part of every Olympics since 1920.

The IOC has reiterated its threat to leave boxing out of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics PHOTO: AP

"So it's now up to the National Federations to drive this change and to work to create a body that we can work in partnership with because we cannot move forward with this current situation," McConnell said.

- The IOC has reiterated its threat to leave boxing out of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics if national federations continue to align themselves with the suspended International Boxing Association (IBA)

The Olympic qualifiers for the Paris Games are being organised under the authority of the Paris 2024 Boxing Unit (PBU), an ad-hoc panel created by the IOC Executive Board.

"The IOC EB made it clear, once again, that this must be the last time that such a process is undertaken by the IOC," McConnell added.

The IOC also reiterated that even if boxing is added to the 2028 Olympic programme, the IBA will not be involved in its organisation.

"The IOC Session in Mumbai in 2023 also made it clear that the IBA will not be involved in the organisation of the boxing tournament at LA28, should boxing be included in the sports programme," McConnell said.

It is to be noted that last year, a group of national federations, including those of the United States and Britain launched a new organisation -- World Boxing -- to secure the long-term future of the sport at the Olympic Games.

The governing body has been seeking recognition from the IOC to represent boxing in the Games.

The IBA subsequently suspended the national federations of Germany, New Zealand, Sweden and the Netherlands for their participation in what the world body called a "rogue" boxing organisation. *—AP*